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TALES OF THE ZENANA.

VOL. I.

Extracts from some Press Notices of
PANDURANG HARI

EDITED WITH A PREFACE

BY

SIR H. BARTLE E. FRERE.

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HENRY S. KING & CO.

TALES OF THE ZENANA

OR

A NUWAB'S LEISURE HOURS.

BY

W. B. HOCKLEY,

AUTHOR OF 'PANDURANG HARI

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE BY
LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

HENRY S. KING & Co.

65 CORNHILL & 12 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

1874.

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INTRODUCTION.

I have been asked to write an introduction to this book—a task which should have been committed to Sir Bartle Frere, who has lately introduced the new edition of ‘Pandurang Hari,’ the first work of the author of these ‘Tales of a Zenana.’

When Sir Bartle Frere wrote his introduction to ‘Pandurang Hari,’ he was not aware that its author, Mr. Hockley, had written any other work, and this work had become so rare that, up to the present time, only two copies have been found. ‘Pandurang Hari’ should be read after Colonel Meadows Taylor’s novel, ‘Tara,’ which is also now in course of re-publication by Messrs. King & Co. It treats of the same part of India and the same people, the Mahrattas, at a period a little subsequent to that of ‘Tara.’ Whilst ‘Tara’ takes the heroic view of the Mahratta character, ‘Pandurang Hari’ takes the prosaic or matter-of-fact view, and it might be said that the

characters in the two novels are rather the reflex of the different characters of the authors, and that the cloud which unfortunately hung over Mr. Hockley has descended on 'Pandurang Hari.' This observation applies, however, more to the male characters, for that of Sagoonah, who at last becomes the bride of Pandurang Hari, is equal to that of Tara, which may be taken as a testimony to the undoubted merits of the women of India. The 'Tales of a Zenana,' which were published by Saunders & Otley in 1827, are far superior to 'Pandurang Hari' in wit and liveliness ; and the reader will perhaps be inclined on account of their merits to regret that Mr. Hockley did not serve under some other public office less vigilant than that of the East India Company. The original title, 'The Zenana ; or, A Nawab's Leisure Hours,' conveys no idea of the book, which contains a number of tales equal to many in the 'Arabian Nights,' and which can be read separately, so that the reader is not obliged to go through the whole three volumes at once.

The following biographical details with regard to our author have been collected from various contributions to 'Notes and Queries.' Mr. William Browne Hockley was born November 9, 1792, and went to Haileybury January 19, 1812. He proceeded to Bombay May 9, 1813,

and was dismissed from his judgeship in September of 1821. In June 1823 he was tried at Bombay, and acquitted by the jury after a speech by his lawyer lasting more than four hours. He was defended by Mr. Ayrton, father of the late First Commissioner of Public Works. He was finally dismissed with a pension of 150*l.* a year, March 17, 1824. He then disappeared from view, and died August 22, 1860. Three other novels on Indian subjects, published in 1828, 1831, and 1843, have also been attributed to our author; but from other 'Notes' they would appear to be due to the pen of Major Thomas Henry Otley, who was born about 1804, and died at Bombay April 8, 1857.

Sir Bartle Frere observes in his introduction to 'Pandurang Hari' that its re-publication now will be of use to thoughtful Englishmen as well as Hindus who interest themselves with questions relating to the progress of Indian nations in modern times. This is certainly the case also with the 'Tales of a Zenana;' for whilst Hindu bankers and merchants may rejoice that sword-play and other incidents frequently occurring in these novels are now rarely met with, the Englishman may better understand how other classes in India may prefer the chances of success and high preferment, chequered by occasional mishaps, to

the monotonous absence of high official employment in the territory under direct British government, and to the peaceful yet stagnant security which leaves no prospect for the imagination, and little opening for ambition or enterprise.

STANLEY.

LONDON : *July* 29, 1874.

PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

THE AUTHOR of the following pages, shortly after his arrival in India, had the good fortune to be nominated to a civil appointment at an out-station. Ere he could perform the duties required of him to the satisfaction of his superiors he found a thorough knowledge of the Persian and Hindústani languages indispensably necessary ; and as the service he was employed in rendered it requisite that he should be able to converse with the natives of the country with tolerable ease and fluency, he directed his attention more particularly to the colloquial branches of the languages. The first step was to unlearn what he had previously gleaned from books written in the Roman character, and diligently to adhere to the Persian and Nagree, which, together with

daily practice in conversation with the natives, failed not to succeed.

Having conquered the first and greatest difficulty, viz. proper pronounciation, the Author was naturally led to desire a farther intimacy with the languages, as well as manners and customs, of the people amongst whom he was placed. As well, therefore, for amusement as instruction, when evening closed in, he assembled the natives of his establishment, and those who felt competent to the task, requiring from them the relation of some entertaining tale, which the author's moonshee (or tutor), who was invariably present on such occasions, committing to writing, was on the following day translated by his assistance into English. At first considerable hesitation was evinced by the people called upon for this purpose, some pleading ignorance, others want of courage to appear before *Master* in his own apartment, to narrate tales. A promise of reward, however, to him who should relate the most amusing story removed all difficulty. Although but one man in the Author's establishment could claim any pretension to ability, nevertheless, the report having gone abroad, in a few days others offering their services related several popular and traditional tales with evident willingness and good-humour.

Returning to his native land, the Author ventured to offer the public a sketch of Indian manners and habits in a

former production, entitled 'Pandurang Hari.' Gratified by the flattering reception that work has met with, and remarking that an episode therein contained appeared to afford satisfaction, he was led to the idea that a set of Indian Tales would probably be acceptable.

Having selected what appeared to the Author the best amongst the collection, he proceeded to form, on the basis and leading features of them, the following Tales, which may be more approved of than if sent forth in their original shape. Anxious to effect a variety, accompanied by some information, the Tales are arranged in a manner which it is hoped will afford the readers some amusement in *their* leisure hours.

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THE
TALES OF THE ZENANA.

CHAPTER I.

A DISTURBANCE IN COURT.

IN the year 1741, in the latter end of the reign of the Emperor Mahommed, many years before the British appeared on the Indian stage in the characters of rulers over that vast country, the city of Surat was under the government of Nuwab Jelal-ed-deen Khan Behauder, who, though he was responsible for his conduct to the Court at Delhi, was nevertheless possessed of such unlimited power as to differ but little from the Emperor himself. Previous to delineating the character, habits, and customs of the Nuwab, and his court, a short description of the city over which he ruled may not be deemed unnecessary.

Surat is a large and populous city, in the Province of Guzrat, situated on the banks of the river Tapee ; and during the government of Nuwab, Jelal-ed-deen's father preserved its extensive commerce, being considered a port of the greatest consequence in India, and the resort of merchants from every quarter of the world.

Surat was celebrated for the number of eminent and learned Mahommedans it contained. Its streets were thronged with people of all descriptions, whilst in its river rode stately ships from every quarter of the globe. The whole city was encompassed by an inner and an outer wall ; within the precincts of the former resided the Nuwab and all the Mahommedans of rank and consequence. Here also was situated the castle, a well-garrisoned fortress, whose lofty battlements frowned over the waters of the majestic Tapeec.

Between the outer and inner wall was situated the bazaar, and the houses of the merchants, shopkeepers, and artificers ; this part of the city was crowded from sunrise to midnight, by men from all nations on the earth, whose business, through the means of a regular and well-organised police, was transacted without discord or confusion. Such was the flourishing condition of this grand city during the Nuwabship of Jelal-ed-deen's predecessor.

Jelal-ed-deen, alas ! differed greatly from his father ; and on his succession to the Musnud, literature and science, finding no encouragement, gradually took their departure. Although the Nuwab was dead to the advantages to be derived from the dissemination of knowledge, he was sensibly alive to the maintenance of his own dignity. His Durbar was an epitome of the arrangements at Agra and Delhi, and ostentatious splendour existed at Surat to a greater extent than in most cities where a deputy from the Moghul empire held his court. Jelal-ed-deen, though shrewd and tolerably well-informed, was far from being a man of a noble mind. Though irritable to the highest degree, he never for a moment lost sight of the rules of politeness and courtesy, and

was wont to boast that no one could sentence a head to be cut off in so polite and courteous a manner as himself.

Business was daily attended to by the Nuwab, but his chief care was his Zenana, or women's apartments; not that he passed more of his time in that wing of his palace than any other great potentate similarly situated, but he conceived his dignity and state would be appreciated by the number of females within his walls. Under this absurd and erroneous supposition, he spared neither time, trouble, nor expense to complete the establishment of his seraglio. Emissaries were despatched to Persia, Circassia, Delhi, and many other places, to procure ladies for his harem, and after some time he was gratified by beholding under his roof three hundred of the fairest women Asia could produce. These he divided into companies, allotting separate rooms for each of these fair flowers of the seraglio. Each company was governed by a woman, and the whole flock ruled by an experienced female, who had held the same office under his predecessor. A treasurer was appointed, who had implicit orders not to suffer the ladies to want for anything within reach of attainment. Eunuchs stood as guards through all the avenues of this den of beauties, whilst a troop of Rajpúts surrounded the wall by day and night.

Amongst so great a number of ladies the Nuwab had not, hitherto, selected one for his wedded wife, reserving that honour for any future female whom he might chance to meet with more beautiful and more captivating than those already in his possession.

From sunrise to twelve in the day was entirely devoted to

business, and the affairs of state : during this period the Durbar was crowded with officers, attendants, and petitioners. But the person who took the most active part in this daily routine of business was the Nuwab's Vizier, or Deewan, a crafty but intelligent Mahommedan, whose interest it was, for many reasons, to keep the Nuwab in the dark as much as possible, and allow him to hear only such affairs as he thought fit to make him acquainted with.

This man's name was Moye-ed-din, who had filled the office of Deewan under the former Nuwab, from whose indefatigable attention to business Moye-ed-din was almost a cipher at the Durbar ; and would long ago have resigned the situation but for the hope of the speedy succession of Jelal-ed-deen, whose indolent habits he trusted would pave the way towards wealth and dignity. This man it was who suggested to Jelal-ed-deen the mighty name to be acquired from a numerous and well-regulated seraglio ; hoping that his master, intoxicated with the society of this host of fair syrens, would gradually throw the whole weight of state affairs into his hands, and thus afford him that opportunity of enriching himself which, under the former Nuwab, he had sighed for in vain.

The arrangements, however, made by the Nuwab for the despatch of business was a sad blow to the hopes of the minister, who in vain sought out fresh beauties and invented new amusements to divert his master's attention from the duties of the Durbar. No ingenuity on the part of the Deewan could shake the resolution of the Nuwab. After the hour of twelve, Jelal-ed-deen retired from the fatigues of the Durbar, to repose in the peaceful

apartments of his anderun, from whence nothing but a firman from the Emperor of Delhi could have withdrawn him.

Here, having partaken of his mid-day meal, some woman more witty than the rest would entertain him, relating some interesting story, or singing a few stanzas of the inimitable Hafiz. Another played puchees,¹ and other Indian games ; and when these failed (which they seldom did) to amuse the Nuwab, he would, with his favourite lady, proceed to the Mahmud-a-baugh, a palace in the country, having a beautiful garden filled with the choicest flowers and the most delicious fruits, and adorned with fountains, and arbours of the sweet-smelling jessamine, with avenues of the graceful cypress-trees, and every luxury which the mind of man could invent, and the hand of Nature bring to perfection. In this retreat it would have been madness to have intruded on this Eastern governor, who, with his lady, his hookah, and his chess-board, reclined under some shady tree, wrapt up in self-satisfaction and delight.

Moye-ed-din employed his time in a very different manner ; for, perceiving with regret the Nuwab's unaccountable taste for both business and pleasure, his was no easy task so to conduct himself as not to appear too anxious to engross the former, or too assiduous to administer to the latter. Whilst his master, therefore, was lounging under arbours of odoriferous mogree, or listening to the tales of his mistresses, he was parading through the city, with a numerous train of attendants, giving ear to the voice of complaint, or what was to him far more pleasing, the soft speeches of flattery or the humble tones of submission. By these means he

¹ A sort of chess.

became acquainted with all the intricate turns and windings of each complaint to be brought before the Nuwab on the following day.

Thus armed at all points, he allowed each petitioner access to the Musnud, and never presumed, in his master's presence, to receive a paper or issue an order ; pretending profound ignorance of all that was going forward, until the Nuwab himself deigned to consult him ; then indeed, after reading the complaint, and suggesting a few questions to be put to the complainant, he would ponder deeply on the subject ; and at last venture, with profound submission, to offer an opinion, which, from his knowledge of the affair, was generally correct : even this, however, required to be managed with peculiar skill and adroitness, lest the Nuwab should suspect him of a previous interference on the subject ; or, what was equally dangerous, look upon him with an eye of jealousy, on finding a man of superior talent and discernment than himself.

To avoid suspicion, and avert the shaft of jealousy, therefore, required no small share of ingenuity and caution. Moye-ed-din's cunning consequently suggested the policy of occasionally drawing a wrong conclusion, at the same time letting fall some expression by which the Nuwab could not fail of coming to the right one, or to that which his interest made him desirous should be considered correct ; upon which the artful knave would exclaim, "Wah ! wah !" ¹ in praise of his master's learning and ability. Such exclamations were not confined to Moye-ed-din alone, but echoed and re-echoed through the whole Durbar. Could justice be at last obtained, it was perhaps of little consequence which of

¹ A common exclamation of wonder or approbation.

the two, the master or the servant, arrived at the truth of the subject in debate ; but, alas ! the poisoned finger of the minister, having once interposed between the right and the wrong, turned light into darkness, and rendered darkness darker still.

A circumstance, however, happened which in a measure opened the eyes of the Nuwab. One day, as he was sitting in full Durbar, he observed an unusual bustle at the further extremity of the hall, as if some one was anxious to approach the Musnud, but was repulsed. He enquired the cause of such indecorous behaviour. No answer was given, but a profound silence reigned through the spacious apartment. Moye-ed-din sat stroking his beard and adjusting his moustachios, imagining such external marks of composure would effectually conceal the internal perturbation under which he laboured.

The Nuwab, not seeing his minister active in investigating the cause of the commotion, shrewdly suspected he was, somehow or other, interested in the affair. Standing up, therefore, himself, he called aloud, ‘ If there be anyone whose progress to the seat of justice has been arrested, let him now come forth, on pain of punishment.’ Moye-ed-din now thought proper to arise, and echoing his master’s words, cried out, ‘ Come forth !’ It were impossible to give a correct idea of the awe depicted upon the countenances of all present. Everyone made way for the person who was expected to come forth ; so that the centre of the hall, before crowded to excess, now resembled a spacious street, thronged on each side with the anxious and fear-stricken multitude. Not a sound was heard, save the falling of the water from a magnificent marble fountain, opposite the folding-doors of the

hall, and immediately in front of the sumptuous Musnud; this, however, as if to add to the terrors experienced by the whole court, suddenly stopped. All eyes were turned towards the fountain.

Moye-ed-din alone kept his eye fixed on the Nuwab's countenance, on which was depicted a rage which he felt could only be assuaged by the infliction of some dreadful punishment upon some one, perhaps himself; yet, from the length of time which had elapsed without any complainant having approached the Musnud, he buoyed himself up with the hope that the petitioner, awed by the solemnity of the scene, had repented his temerity, and effected his retreat from the hall.

The Nuwab being determined to fathom the mystery, again rose, and pointing to the fountain, exclaimed, 'The fountain of water has ceased to flow; but God forbid the fountain of justice should, through the machinations of any evil-disposed persons (here he cast a peculiar glance upon Moye-ed-din), be interrupted in its course! I again command the man to come forth and present me his petition.'

After this harangue, a person was seen slowly making his way through the crowd at the bottom of the hall. All eyes were fixed upon him. He was an aged Mahommedan, and a dyer by trade; in his hand he held a paper, which, from the indigo-dye on his fingers, and the dreadful perspiration he had suffered ever since the first imperative summons of the Nuwab, was not exactly in a condition to be placed in the hands of the mighty delegate Nuwab, Jelal-ed-deen Behauder. Moye-ed-din, after the poor dyer had thrice performed his reverence, and thrice audibly struck his

forehead on the marble slabs, cried, 'Stay, fellow ! would you stain the hands of royalty ? Let my secretary copy your petition.'

The Nuwab, seeing through the flimsy artifice of his Deewan, replied, 'Neither the hand or the eye of royalty (as you have been pleased to express yourself) can be polluted by the voice of complaint, in whatsoever garb it may be introduced.' Thus saying, he stretched forth his hand and received the paper.

Moye-ed-din, agonised beyond measure, and perspiring at every pore, endeavoured to clothe his countenance in the garb of ill-disguised serenity and composure ; but alas ! his attempts were fruitless, for the quick, penetrating eye of the Nuwab, though apparently entirely bent on the contents of the petition, scanned with a single glance the lineaments of his minister's face, whereon he read a confirmation of the assertions contained in the paper before him. Unwillingly, however, to publicly disgrace his minister, he thrust the paper in his bosom, and directed the business of the day to proceed.

Such was the consternation of Moye-ed-din as entirely to deprive him of his wonted duplicity and cunning, which he had fully intended to have practised in many a case this day to be decided ; so that, to the astonishment of several suitors who had relied on his support, their requests were refused by the Nuwab, who had passed judgment on their claims without deigning to consult his terror-stricken minister. On the other hand, persons complained against, instead of coming off with flying colours, as they had anticipated from the promises of the Deewan, were severely punished, or heavily fined. It was in vain these unhappy people cast their eyes upon the dejected Moye-ed-din, whose

whole attention seemed to be bestowed upon his beard, which he continued to stroke with unabated assiduity and perseverance.

At the hour of twelve, the Durbar as usual broke up, and the Nuwab, having partaken of his mid-day repast, retired to his Zenana. And whilst he is listening to the heart-alluring tales of his mistresses, it may be considered fit opportunity to relate particulars of that event which caused the consternation in the the hall of justice above mentioned, for a full elucidation of which the reader is referred to the following chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAVOURITE'S FALL.

THE whole city of Surat, as has already been stated, was surrounded by a lofty wall, having an inner one, which encompassed that part called the Moghul Serai, wherein resided the Nuwab, and all Mahommedans of rank and respectability ; whilst the space between the outer and inner wall was occupied by the bazaar, and the residences of shopkeepers, tradesmen, artificers, &c. It had ever been the custom for the Cotwall¹ of the bazaar to take cognisance of all disputes which had their origin in the latter, whilst the authorities of the Durbar decided all differences which might arise in the former, giving ear nevertheless to appeals from the Cotwall's decisions, in cases of importance.

Moye-ed-din, however, had lately presumed to interfere with the decisions of the Cotwall's court, in cases by no means of an important nature. The Cotwall, tenacious of his prerogative, determined, when a favourable opportunity should offer, to put a stop to this unwarrantable interference with the decrees of his court. He was too cautious to complain against the Deewan in person, but waited until some dissatisfied suitor should repair to

¹ Police Master.

him, complaining of the minister's presumptuous acts. This at last occurred. A poor dyer, who toiled morning, noon, and night for his subsistence, had been accustomed for many years to hang his clothes up to dry in a small space of ground contiguous to his own house, which, in fact, he had a right to do, the ground having once had a house built thereon, which had belonged to his father, to whose property he had become heir. His neighbour, however, a butcher, had often asserted his claim to the ground in question; and one day, the dyer having occasion to absent himself on some business, left his younger son in charge of sundry cloths, which were hanging on lines on this said piece of ground. On his return, late in the evening, instead of seeing his newly-dyed cloths, which he had expected to find dried, and fit for delivering to his customers, what was his astonishment at perceiving their place supplied by sheeps' heads and legs of mutton, whilst his own cloths were trampled under foot, covered with dust and dirt! The amazed dyer called to his son, from whom receiving no answer, he determined to severely chastise him on his return home, fully persuaded the young stripling had neglected his duty, and joined the gambols of the boys in the bazaar. On entering his house, however, his surprise increased on finding the poor lad stretched out on the ground, bleeding profusely.

The anxious father quickly raised his son, disfigured and severely wounded; and having bathed his head, from whence the blood continued to flow, the boy by degrees revived, and when sufficiently recovered related to his father all that happened in his absence; how that, in conformity with his instructions, he attended on the drying-ground, and turned the cloths from time to time towards

the sun. About the middle of the day, several boys entered the ground and commenced their sport ; one of these youths was the son of their neighbour, the butcher, who, not content with playing on the ground, induced his playmates to aid him in pulling down the cloths.

The dyer's son, enraged at beholding his father's property so wantonly spoiled, remonstrated rather sharply with the boys, upon which the butcher's son made use of the most abusive language, whereupon the dyer's son struck him on the face. The boy ran roaring and screaming to his father's shop, and made him acquainted with the manner in which he had been treated by their neighbour's son. Katil-bhae, the butcher, instantly repaired to the spot, and struck the dyer's son a violent blow on the head, which deprived him of his senses for a moment. The young guardian of the cloths recovering himself, arose, and in a spirited manner desired the butcher to quit his father's ground.

' *Your father's !*' said Katil-bhae, in a contemptuous manner. ' I will show you it is my ground.' So saying, he pulled the cloths from off the lines, trampled them under his feet, and replaced them by sheeps' heads and joints of meat from his own stall.

The dyer's son, in his turn, endeavoured to remove the meat, upon which the butcher again struck him with the handle of his large knife, which caused the blood to flow, and turned the boy quite sick ; and in this state the neighbours conveyed him into his father's house.

The poor dyer, having heard this history of the brutal conduct of the butcher, determined upon lodging his complaint before the Cotwall of the bazaar, which he did on the following morning.

The Cotwall having heard the whole story, very properly decided in favour of the dyer, and fined the butcher.

Katil-bhae, being a man of a litigious disposition, was not at all disposed to submit in silence to this decision, and in consequence waited upon Moye-ed-din, the Deewan, taking care not to go empty-handed. Moye-ed-din without hesitation sent persons to put the butcher in possession of the ground, accompanied by an order to fine the dyer, who paid the money so unjustly extorted from him, and then repaired to the Cotwall, to whom he poured forth his grievances. This, then, was the time most favourable for the Cotwall's plans for overthrowing the haughty Moye-ed-din; he accordingly advised the dyer to attend at the Durbar, and represent to the Nuwab the injuries he had sustained by the unwarrantable interference of the minister; and in order that the Nuwab might quickly comprehend the nature of the grievance complained of, the Cotwall's clerk drew out a petition, embracing in a short compass the wrongs sustained by the dyer at the hands both of the butcher and the minister.

It was some time ere the dyer could muster up courage to assent to this mode of proceeding. It was an awful thing, said he, to face the Nuwab in his court; he had never ventured near the threshold of the Durbar: and again, how could a poor dyer, as he was, hope for redress, or cope with the powerful Moye-ed-din, with any chance of success? 'Doubtless,' said he, 'I shall fall a victim to the rancour of the Deewan, who will prejudice the Nuwab against me, and the end of it will be, I shall be thrown into prison for my presumption. All these objections were overruled by the Cotwall and his attendants, by assurances of their

protection and support in the hour of trial ; so that by promises and persuasion the poor fellow consented to act as they deemed proper.

It was arranged that the dyer, to secure admission into the hall, should be in waiting at the doors by break of day ; and having once obtained an entrance, the Deewan, insolent and daring as he was, would never venture to eject him. All this being arranged, the petition was written, and delivered into the hands of the dyer, who departed to his home. With such secrecy was all this contrived, that not one word of what was going on reached the ears of Moye-ed-din, until too late to take any steps to counteract their proceedings ; indeed, he was indebted to chance alone for knowing anything of the matter whatever. How he obtained his information is as follows :—

The minister's water-carriers were in the habit of filling their pots at the fountain in the Nuwab's garden every morning before daybreak. Here, anxiously awaiting the opening of the doors of the Durbar, stood trembling the unfortunate Rung-reez,¹ whose miserable appearance, together with the solicitude depicted on his countenance, could not fail to attract the notice of the water-carriers ; and, desirous of learning what his motive could be for being so early at the justice-hall, they thus accosted him : 'What now, old Kuzl-bashee—why so early in the field ?'

Poor Kuzl-bashee, imagining he should have quite enough speaking inside, refused to spare a word to anyone without the hall, and answered only by a melancholy shake of the head.

The water-carriers, on their return to their master's palace,

¹ Dyer.

mentioned the circumstance to the Jemmidar of the guard, who had just arisen; but as he knew nothing of the quarrels of Katil-bhae and Kuzl-bashee, he gave himself no concern on the subject. Soon after came the Deewan's household barber, who regularly made his appearance every morning, to trim the beards of all the establishment; and lastly, that of the minister himself, who was not so early a riser as the rest. Buxoo-bhae, the barber, like the rest of that profession all over the world, conceived it was part of his duty to give loose to his tongue when he handled a beard; and when he had no news himself to communicate, endeavoured to glean some from those on whom he operated. This morning he happened to be sadly at a loss for intelligence, and therefore endeavoured to gain some from the Jemmidar of the guard, whose beard he was arranging. The Jemmidar, being at a loss for something to communicate, asked the barber why the dyer was posted so early at the Durbar gates.

‘Oh! he is mad, sir—staring mad, sir—you may depend upon it. It is the same fellow who has been creating such disturbances in the bazaar, stealing the butcher's meat, and hanging up his dirty cloths in its place. The Cotwall decided his case; but, between ourselves—but it is not my business, you know——’

‘Go on,’ said the Jemmidar. ‘If you always stopped short when you found yourself chattering about what is not your business, it would be well; but come, this time speak out.’

The shaver was going on with the wrong end of the story as fast as he could, when a messenger from the Deewan summoned him away to the presence of that powerful person; so making his salaam to the Jemmidar, he left him as wise as he was before.

If Buxoo, the barber, conceived it to be his duty to convey intelligence of the most trifling kind to all his customers, how much more so did he consider himself bound to treasure up every tittle of news for the ear of the minister ! The circumstance of the dyer being posted at the door of the Durbar so early in the morning, he imagined might be acceptable news to the Deewan ; or if not, he could not possibly anticipate the contrary. Ignorant of the active part the Deewan had taken in the disputes of the dyer and his opponent, poor Buxoo determined, if an opportunity offered, to mention his bit of news, trifling as it might be considered. On entering the Deewan's apartment, the obsequious barber bowed and smiled, and smiled and bowed again, hoping for the usual question of 'What news, Buxoo?' which the Deewan seldom failed to ask previous to trusting him with his beard. This day, however, the minister was unusually gloomy and reserved, and bade the babbling shaver be quick and dress his beard.

'To hear is to obey!' said the wondering Buxoo, and commenced his work.

There appearing but little chance of the Deewan's speaking first, Buxoo endeavoured to draw him into conversation, beginning with "Hot day my, lord." A nod was the only reply ; but even this, as he had received no rebuke, was, he considered, a step gained, and supposed more of his observations would be agreeable ; he therefore thus continued : 'Very hot indeed, and so some folks will find it to-day in Durbar ; that they will ; I would not be in their skins for a trifle.'

'Why to-day, Buxoo?' said the Deewan. 'Have you heard any particular news?'

‘News ! oh, my lord ! I believe I have indeed. Lord bless those who are in the wrong, that’s all ; but I said how ’twould be if once the clapper of that old fellow’s jaws was set a-going.’

‘Who ? who ? what old fellow ?’ asked the now curious Moye-ed-din.

‘Who, my lord ? Why, who should it be but that old fellow who has been setting the whole bazaar by the ears ? Oh, my lord, would you had had the trying him instead of the Cotwall ; he would then have been effectually prevented from sneaking about the Durbar gates all night.’

‘Villain !’ cried the Deewan ; ‘speak ! who is it you mean ? who has been posted at the gates all night ?’

The barber, terrified beyond measure at this unaccountable violence, dropped his scissors and his shaving apparatus, and fell flat on his face, heartily repenting the latitude he had given his tongue.

‘Speak !’ vociferated the Deewan, ‘or, by Mahommed, I will smite your head off !’

‘Spare me, my lord !’ cried the trembling Buxoo ; ‘spare me. I will speak : the dyer ; the dyer—old Kuzl-bashee. The dyer, my lord, that is all, my lord ; and may Providence protect him, and all that he has involved in his cursed complaint.’

This intelligence, which the inoffensive but imprudent barber had imagined to be of such minor importance, fell like a thunder-bolt on the ears of the proud and haughty minister, who, not wishing to evince his perturbation before the barber, hastily dismissed him from his presence, although his beard was only half-dressed. Buxoo-bhae, waiting for no second command, quickly retreated.

Moye-ed-din summoned his secretary and his confidential clerks, and gave them peremptory orders to prevent, if possible, the dyer having access to the Musnud. They promised obedience, and in order to execute their commands hastened to the Durbar, where they found the unhappy Kuzl-bashee crouched in a corner, in conversation with several of the Cotwall's clerks. This scene convinced the Deewan's party they had come too late. One of them, however, contrived to gain the dyer's ear, and in a tone of pretended friendship strongly advised him not to risk applying to the Nuwab. 'Consider,' said he, 'how attached he is to the Deewan : think you he will give ear to the complaints of fellows like you? Go home, and think no more of such folly !'

The poor petitioner began seriously to think this was indeed most wholesome advice, and was half-determined to follow it, when one of the Cotwall's clerks whispered in his ear not to heed whatever the Deewan's hanger-on had told him. 'Go on boldly,' said he, 'and present your petition ; the Nuwab detests the minister, and will assuredly investigate your case. For shame ! are you a man, and thus fearful ?'

'Now,' thought the dyer, 'what am I to do? one tells me one thing, and one another ; oh ! woe is me, that I ever consented to appear in this place !'

The Nuwab now entered the Durbar, amidst the loud praises of his Chobdars, who vociferated his titles and virtues through the lofty and spacious apartment.

'Now, Kuzl-bashee,' said the Cotwall's myrmidons, 'now is your time ! up, up, and lay your paper at his feet.'

The dyer attempted to do as he was bid, but was pulled back

by some of the opposite party, and again shoved forward by the Cotwall's adherents. This pulling and shoving was the confusion which attracted the notice of the Nuwab, who, as has been already related, at last became possessed of the blue-stained dirty petition of the unfortunate Kuzl-bashee, dyer in the city of Surat.

CHAPTER III.

FROM DEEWAN TO ATTAR.

THE Nuwab, having turned the affair in his mind, became fully sensible of the corrupt disposition of his Deewan; yet, from the length of time he had held his situation, felt reluctant to disgrace him by dismissal; at the same time justice demanded him to notice such mercenary and unjustifiable conduct.

Before the following morning, therefore, a messenger was despatched to the minister's palace, to inform the Deewan that the Nuwab would dispense with his presence in Durbar until further orders. It may be imagined how galling was a verbal message of this kind to the proud and haughty mind of Moya-ed-din. 'Had the Nuwab,' said he to himself, 'conveyed his orders to me in writing, sickness might have been urged as a plea for non-attendance at court, but as it is the whole city cannot fail to become acquainted with my disgrace.'

We must leave the dejected Deewan to repent his misdeeds, and return to the Nuwab, whose first care was to summon Katil-bhae the butcher, Kuzl-bashee the dyer, and Noor-mahommed the Cotwall, with several other persons mentioned as witnesses in the petition of the dyer. All being in attendance, the Nuwab demanded from the Cotwall the record of the trial held before him

in the dispute between Kuzl-bashee the dyer and Katil-bhae the butcher. This was the first time the Cotwall had ever been called upon to produce any record of his proceedings; and although conscious he had acted in this particular case in the most just and impartial manner, he presented his Duftur¹ with fear and trembling.

The Nuwab, having caused the extracts to be read over, complimented the Cotwall on his impartial conduct; at the same time observing that there appeared to be two distinct causes of dispute, one for the assault committed by the butcher on the dyer's son, and another respecting the right to the piece of ground. Now, had these been tried separately, the cause would have assumed a clearer and more comprehensive aspect. Witnesses were examined in the presence of the Nuwab, who became fully satisfied that the dyer had been greatly aggrieved. It was now the butcher's turn to become alarmed, and, falling on his face, he begged for mercy. The Nuwab sentenced him to pay a fine of one hundred rupees, to give up for ever all claims to the ground, which was indisputably the property of the dyer, and for the assault to receive thirty stripes on the soles of his feet in the public market-place. Katil-bhae was beginning to bellow for mercy, when, the Nuwab waving his hand, he was hurried away and quickly bastinadoed. The Cotwall was presented with a pair of handsome shawls, in testimony of the high satisfaction his conduct had afforded the Nuwab.

We must now take leave for the present of Katil-bhae and Kuzl-bashee, upon whose disputes we have dwelt, being the foundation of an event which leads to the narration of several, we hope,

¹ Record Book.

interesting and amusing tales. We left Moye-ed-din chewing the cud of repentance, and framing in his mind several plans how to regain the lost favour of his master. Alas ! he feared his attempts would be fruitless; no light seemed to dawn on the melancholy gloom which enveloped his mind. He fancied he was reminded hourly of the degradation under which he was labouring by the least trifling omission or forgetfulness of his servants, who, nevertheless, were as assiduous as ever to please him. Six months elapsed, and yet no step had he gained towards reconciliation with the Nuwab, who seemed to have erased the recollection of him from the tablets of his memory.

During this whole time, the unhappy ex-Deewan had confined himself within the walls of his palace, situated on the banks of the river, ignorant of all that was going forward, and only occasionally hearing a word or two of news from the loquacious Buxoo barber, whose services were now only in requisition once in the week, instead of daily, as heretofore. At last a gleam of hope burst on the melancholy Moye-ed-din. On the last day of the week, as he was sitting in his room, which overlooked the river, Buxoo-bhae, the barber, was announced; he entered, wearing an unusual smiling countenance, and commenced stropping his razors with unaccustomed celerity and adroitness; and such was his haste to begin his operations, that he stumbled over his own leathern bag and nearly fell into the arms of the astonished Moye-ed-din.

‘Why how now, Buxoo,’ said he, ‘hast thou forgotten the laws of the Prophet so early in the morning, and stained thy filthy mouth with liquor? Or art thou blind?’

‘Blind, my lord, quite blind,’ replied the barber, ‘and ’tis no

wonder that I am so, for I have visited the sun in all its splendour. My eyes have been within a yard of the planet itself! Is it a wonder, therefore, I am dazzled?’

‘Ah!’ cried the now curious Moye-ed-din, ‘what may be this wondrous luminary? A woman, I warrant ye.’

‘A heavenly one!’

‘Within reach?’

‘Ay, my lord.’

‘Where? Speak, and name your reward.’

‘No one knows but myself.’

‘Speak, I say, or dread’—my power, he would have said; but recollecting the very narrow limits in which it was contained, after a pause, changed it to—‘my displeasure.’

‘My lord, I am your slave. I have dressed your beard these twenty years; and have, during that time, duly and truly related to you all I know, and all I saw. God forbid that I should now refuse you either the labour of my hands or the words of my mouth. See you that large and stately ship, just passed the bar of the river?’

‘The one with the broad red flag, Buxoo?’

‘The same.’

‘Where is she from?’

‘Bussorah, and the Red Sea.’

‘Well, and her cargo diamonds, I suppose; and these have dazzled your senses?’

‘Ay, my lord, she bears a diamond indeed, which would dazzle any person’s senses. Be patient, my lord, and attend to me. At daybreak this morning, as I was putting my shop in order, an

Arab came up to me, apparently desirous of having his beard dressed. I was on the alert immediately, as I always am, and no one can say but Buxoo-bhae is——'

'Never mind, my good man—go on; you are the best of barbers,' said the curious Moya-ed-din.

Buxoo, bowing, continued: 'Well, my lord, when I began to handle the Arab's beard he fell into a mighty passion, and said something in Arabic, which I did not understand; however, by signs, and a word or two of Hindústanee, which he fortunately was master of, I comprehended he desired me to accompany him to the river; so packing up my instruments, I followed him to the Custom-house, and from thence to a small boat, in which we both seated ourselves. The Arab rowed as hard as he could, and we soon came alongside that stately ship which I have just pointed out to your lordship.'

'Well, and what happened then? Do, pray go on,' said Moya-ed-din.

'Why, my lord, a great deal happened; for I saw—but stop—no, I did not see yet—first, as I was about to mention, I ascended the ship, which was full of Arabs and slaves; then my conductor led me to the great cabin, one-half of which was occupied by the captain, whose beard, I was made to understand, required to be trimmed previous to his going on shore. Just as I was beginning to cut and clip a violent altercation ensued on the deck, so much so that the captain abruptly started up, leaving me alone in his cabin; at this moment, a heart-rending sigh from the adjoining cabin broke upon my ear. My curiosity being excited, I approached the partition, which being constructed of rude and uneven materials,

I soon found a chink, to which I applied my eye: when, how can I describe my amazement at beholding, reclining on a couch, one of the loveliest females man ever set eyes upon ! fair as alabaster, lips like the ruby, a form more graceful than the cypress, and eyes like the brilliant stars of heaven: she seemed dejected and unhappy; yet was there such beauty in her grief as to render sorrow a feast of delight. Short was my pleasure: the step of the Captain hurried me once more into the centre of the cabin, when, with my scissors in my hand, I received him with a low salaam. Such, however, was the wonder and curiosity which inflamed my breast, together with the consciousness of my having dared to pry into the secrets of my noble customer, that not only my hand but my whole body shook so violently, as to render my services for some minutes entirely useless. The Arab, imagining I was awed by his grandeur alone, made allowances for my awkwardness, and suffered me to take a cup of water, which in a measure composed me, so as to be enabled to go through my job with tolerable satisfaction to my employer, who has desired me to return with some perfumes ; and, as soon as possible, it is my intention to wait upon him.'

During this recital the countenance of Moya-ed-din brightened up, and he conceived a fair opportunity presented itself for him, at least, to attempt a reinstatement in the good graces of the Nuwab. A thought struck him, which he communicated to the barber, viz. that he should accompany Buxoo, in disguise as a perfume-seller, by which means he might chance to get a view of this houri, of whose beauty he had received so glowing a description. Buxoo, giving a ready assent, retired to purchase the perfumes and a suitable disguise for his master. On his return

he found the ex-minister awaiting his coming with breathless impatience, and speedily arrayed himself in the dress necessary for the character he was about to assume. Both being ready to sally forth, Moye-ed-din began to entertain serious apprehensions of a discovery, should he, by any accident, meet with any of the inhabitants of the city, to whom he was well known.

Buxoo, never at a loss for an act of ingenuity, recommended his master to stain his beard, assuring him he knew of a certain dye which would answer the purpose admirably ; accordingly he was again despatched on this second errand. He quickly returned, however, and opening a small phial, poured the contents into the palms of his hands and applied it to the beard of his master, which in a few moments, from one of the most glossy black, was converted into a coarse sort of caroty-red colour, by which means they trusted discovery would be next to impossible. Moye-ed-din led the way down a narrow back-staircase, and taking a key from his girdle, unlocked a private door, from whence by a few steps they arrived at the water's edge. Beckoning to some fishermen, a boat was soon in readiness for them, and in a short time they reached the Arab ship, and were allowed to come on board, where the captain was walking the deck. The barber pointed to his companion, the perfumer, who was beginning to uncover his sweets, when his intentions were thwarted by beholding, on the opposite gangway, old Kuzl-bashee, the dyer, disposing of some of his cloths to the Arab crew. Buxoo, not having noticed the dyer, was at a loss to account for his companion's extreme awkwardness, and proceeded with his own hands to select the different essences. The attention of all around the perfumer was

directed to the opposite side of the deck, where stood the Arabs abusing the dyer for staring about him, without concluding their bargains. The fact was, he having smelled the perfumes, lifted up his eyes to see which of the perfumers of the city had been fortunate enough to be the first to treat with the Arabs. What was his surprise, therefore, on beholding a face to which, though by no means altogether a stranger, yet one which he certainly had never remembered to have seen selling essences in the bazaar. Unable to solve the mystery, he entirely neglected his own affairs, and brought on him the abuse of the crew, who threatening to forcibly possess themselves of his goods, he was under the necessity of paying attention to their demands, and when again he found leisure to lift up his eyes the perfumer was gone, though the barber was still stationary.

The captain, to avoid the bustle on deck, had taken the perfumer to his own cabin, where it was his intention to make his selection ; and whilst so employed, the dyer, who had now tied up his bundle, approached the well-known Buxoo, and having paid him the compliment of the usual salutation of ‘Salaam Alikum,’ commenced a conversation with which the barber would willingly have dispensed cursing his unlucky stars for bringing him in contact with the very fellow the mention of whose name alone, on a former occasion, had brought down the wrath of the minister.

‘How sweet you smell, brother barber,’ said old Kuzl-bashee, snuffing up the odour of the perfumes. ‘What ! are you turned attar?’¹

¹ Perfumer.

‘No,’ answered Buxoo, ‘I don’t meddle with other persons’ trades.’

‘Indeed, Buxoo, one would think, by the sweet smell about you, that you had entered quite a different line of business : now, is not this the case? And was not that your partner who was here just now?’

‘It is not the case ; and he that was here just now is not my partner.’

‘Well, excuse my asking, but I never saw him before in the bazaar. Pray what is his name? His perfumes are so powerful, I should like to be a purchaser. What may be his name, pray?’

‘His name is Kumbuckt.’¹

‘Ah ! my friend Buxoo, you are facetious ; but seriously I am anxious to know his name.’

‘Then ask him yourself ; you can’t have better authority ; and as to his perfumes, they are far beyond your means to obtain.’

‘True, brother, but he has departed. Oh, no, here he comes—been into the cabin, has he !—made rare bargains, I warrant.’ Moye-ed-din, on stepping upon deck, had espied the old dyer in conversation with the barber at the gangway, and instantly covered his face with his shawl. The barber called to his companion, saying, ‘The boat is ready, brother.’ And Moye-ed-din, brushing past the dyer, hastily descended into the boat, followed by the anxious Buxoo, who, looking up, perceived the dyer likewise descending the ship’s side, with the intention of joining them. He gave a sign to the fishermen, therefore, who, comprehending his meaning, pushed off ere the dyer’s foot could touch the boat,

¹ Unfortunate.

thus leaving him clinging to the ship's side, to the no small amusement of the crew and all on board. Rowing briskly, they quickly regained the minister's palace without any further interruption.

Secure from interruption, the Deewan threw off his disguise, and was half-inclined to embrace the barber, so delighted was he with their success. The only damp to his spirits was the sight of the innocent cause of all his misfortunes, old Kuzl-bashee. The barber, however, soothed his apprehensions by positive assurances of the impossibility of his having been recognised, and anxiously enquired if he had obtained a sight of the lovely captive on board the ship. The Deewan answered in the affirmative, and dismissed his friend Buxoo, with particular injunctions not to mention to anyone the existence of the fair lady. 'Remember, Buxoo,' said he, 'great shall be your reward if all succeeds ; therefore be secret ; and as we are beforehand with everyone, let us keep so.' The barber swore to develop the secret to no one, and intended most faithfully to adhere to his oath. The caution of Moye-ed-din, however, came rather too late, for the tattling Buxoo had already informed his wife of his discovery, previous to his waiting upon the Deewan to trim his beard. Not anticipating any bad consequences therefrom, he wisely was silent on the subject when receiving the injunctions of secrecy from his master. Humbly bowing, therefore, he took his leave.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARAB'S WORD.

IT will be necessary to state by what fortunate event Moye-ed-din had been enabled to obtain a sight of the fair lady on board the Arab ship. Having succeeded in gaining an introduction into the cabin, and free from the scrutinising glances of old Kuzl-bashee, he felt considerably more at ease, and sufficiently collected to maintain the character he had assumed. Quickly opening his box, therefore, he overpowered the captain with his offers and recommendations of this scent and that perfume, speaking with a volubility which astonished the noble captain, who, however, comprehended not a syllable of what he heard ; for although Moye-ed-din was an excellent Arabic scholar, he was too circumspect to make use of that language. The captain, puzzled to discover which were the best perfumes, took several bottles into the adjoining cabin, to consult with the fair captive, leaving Moye-ed-din in uninterrupted possession of the great cabin. Anxiously he sought out and discovered the friendly chink in the partition described by the barber, and there gratified his senses by beholding a being far more exquisitely beautiful than he could have imagined the earth to be possessed of.

‘She must be in the Nuwab’s Zenana,’ said he to himself, ‘and

that before another day is passed ; and then shall the star of Moye-ed-din's grandeur once more emerge from the cloud by which it has so long been enshrouded.'

The pretended attar, imitating the sagacious barber, took care to resume his place in the centre of the cabin before the captain returned to him ; and having concluded his bargains, was allowed to depart whence he came. His chagrin at beholding old Kuzl-bashee on the deck has been already described, but he was little aware to what perplexities he was doomed by his simple endeavours to avoid him. When the barber had retired from the presence of Moye-ed-din, the delighted ex-minister rubbed his hands in an ecstasy of delight, called for his hookah, and after each puff of smoke from his mouth a fresh plan seemed to enter into his head, and his chillum¹ was expended ere he could determine on one through which he might ensure success. At last said he to himself, 'I will invite the Arab captain to dinner. He is a stranger, and knows not of my disgrace, and will gladly accept the invitation of the Deewan. Over our hookahs we will become friends, and I shall then find out whether the beautiful creature I have just beheld is his wife, his mistress, or his slave : if the latter, she is mine ; and thus is the first stone in the path of glory securely laid.' So saying, he penned a polite invitation to the Arab captain, whose ship he perceived was slowly approaching the anchorage. The letter was despatched by a trusty messenger, with orders to deliver it into the hands of the captain himself.

Having given the necessary orders for dinner, Moye-ed-din took his station at the window overlooking the river, in order that

¹ Small cup in which the tobacco is placed. .

he might watch the progress of his messenger. He saw the anchor of the ship fall and the sails furled, and he saw his Hicarrah arrive alongside, and go on board her; but what he most wished not to have seen that did he behold, namely, the Cotwall's dobash¹ and his treasurer just leaving the vessel, and making their salaam to the Arab Captain. What could be the meaning of this? Probably it was a visit of an official nature, to see if the ship's crew were free from disease, or to report on the number of slaves, and nature of the cargo; all particulars of which he knew it to be the Cotwall's duty to enquire into. Endeavouring to satisfy himself that the visit of the Cotwall's dobash and treasurer was one of a public nature, and no ways likely to interfere with his private concerns, he dismissed from his mind all unpleasant apprehensions on the subject, especially as he discerned the Arab Captain stepping into a boat, followed by his trusty messenger. They approached the palace, and would be with him sooner than he had imagined.

So anxious had he been to observe all that was going on in the river, that he had entirely forgotten to dress himself and prepare for the reception of his guest; hurrying, therefore, unto his anderun, he selected a very handsome pair of keem-cáb trousers, a coat with a splendid kummer-bund, red turbana, and magnificent shawl. In removing his dress he found he had, in his endeavours to avoid old Kuzl-bashee, broken a bottle of essence which he had thrust into a side-pocket; and now, for the first time, began to be sensible how very powerful both his person and apartment smelt of essence; indeed, the whole house was impregnated with the oily

¹ Interpreter.

fragrance. He much feared he should be taken for a perfumer in good earnest. Scarcely had he finished dressing, when a servant announced the arrival of the Captain, whom Moye-ed-din desired might be seated in the hall, and that he would soon join him.

Suddenly he recollected his stained beard, and proceeded to wash and clean it, in the expectation of once more beholding his own glossy black one. But what was his mortification on finding that all his attempts to remove the stain were ineffectual ; the more he washed, and soaped, and rubbed, the stronger appeared the abominable carrotty hue of his beard. He cursed the barber from the bottom of his heart, though the poor fellow was as ignorant as himself as to the consequences of the application of the liquid he had provided. What could he do? Never was he so perplexed before. His guest was waiting his appearance to welcome him to his palace ; longer delay was impossible ; he called for lime-juice and salt, with which he once more commenced rubbing his beard, until both his arms ached with pain, and he himself brought into a profuse perspiration ; but all to no purpose ; and he was forced to present himself before the Arab Captain labouring under the apprehension that, with his carrotty beard and strongly-scented person and palace, he should certainly be recognised as the perfumer who visited the ship in the morning.

These were not anticipations of the most pleasing kind to a man like Moye-ed-din, who, not being in full powers of his Deewanship, was the more particularly anxious by his external appearance to leave no room in the mind of his guest to imagine the contrary. Having framed no reply if taxed by the Captain

with being no minister, but a cheating perfumer, he entered the hall, and politely welcomed his guest, who drew back with ambiguous looks and rather a haughty deportment. He had long had an opportunity of smelling the perfumes, and now verily believed the vender himself stood before him, having the assurance to assume the name and character of Deewan. Again he thought this could not be the case ; but the magnificence around him and the perfumed carroty beard before him quite confounded him ; for, independent of the hair on the face, he could swear the features were those of the attar from whom he had purchased a few bottles of essence in the morning. Perhaps the Deewan's brother was a perfumer, and brothers are often very much alike ; yet it was not very likely there should be such a difference in their stations of life. These doubts and conjectures crowding so fast on the brain of the Arab, caused him to receive the repeated welcomes of Moye-ed-din with an awkwardness easily to be accounted for by his host, though he endeavoured to sustain the character of Deewan as if nothing had happened to discompose him. He threw his shawl in graceful folds around him, twisted his carroty moustachios, and commenced familiarly to discourse with his guest.

'I was apprehensive,' said he, 'that, as a stranger and a man of rank, you would not find a suitable lodging during your sojourn in this city ; and as I make it a rule to pay attention to all strangers, particularly those of your country, I beg you will consider my palace as your home as long as you remain here.'

The Captain thanked him politely, and now became certain he had entertained unjust suspicions, for he remembered the perfumer

could not speak a word of Arabic, whereas the man before him expressed himself in that language in the most perfect and easy manner; nevertheless he could not take his eyes from the carrotty beard of poor Moye-ed-din, who thought himself bound to notice such a breach of good manners.

‘Excuse me, my lord,’ said the Arab, ‘but I have this day seen a man so exactly resembling yourself in every respect, that, but for your politeness, and the magnificence around me, I could have sworn you were the same man.’

‘Ah, indeed!’ said Moye-ed-deen. ‘Who could the person be? I am not aware of anyone in the city so exactly resembling myself.’

‘Pardon me, my lord; but as I am by your language and manner fully convinced of my error, it is not necessary to mention the person who has certainly the honour of bearing the exact counterpart of your lordship’s countenance.’

No more was said on the subject; and dinner being announced, they withdrew to another apartment and partook of a rich pilau, elegantly dressed curry, soup, and a variety of sweetmeats and the most delicious fruits; after which, water being brought in silver basins, sherbert and hookahs succeeded. The conversation now turned on the dangers of the sea, the state of commerce, and the Court of Persia.

‘I never had so much difficulty in procuring a cargo,’ said the Captain; ‘indeed, my profits, if any, must arise from the sale of my slaves, for I find the market overstocked with every other commodity.’

‘Have you many slaves on board, noble Captain?’

'Why, not so many as I am usually provided with.

'By-the-bye, Captain, talking of slaves, I understand you have on board——'

Here the conversation was interrupted by the arrival and entrance of the Nuwab's messenger, who, having thrice bowed to the ground, said, 'His Highness Nuwab Jelal-ed-deen—may his splendour be dazzling and his prosperity increase—requests the presence of his able and learned Deewan, in two hours' time, at the Mahmud-a-baugh palace.'

Moye-ed-din was utterly confounded and astonished ; but not wishing to betray his confusion, returned in answer that he should hold himself in duty bound to prostrate himself at the appointed time before the illustrious Nuwab. The messenger then, having bowed as before, withdrew. The Arab now became fully convinced of his error, and was more respectful than ever to his gracious host. Moye-ed-din read plainly all that had been passing in his mind, and now with pleasure perceived the effect which the Nuwab's unlooked-for message had made.

'I really cannot help laughing, my lord,' said the Captain, who was smoking a second chillum, 'at my stupidity on having first had the honour of seeing you to-day, for you may remember I took you for another person, who, now I think of it, and have had leisure to contemplate your noble countenance, was not a bit like you. Instead of an aquiline he had a flat, broad, ugly nose, and was not near so tall as you are, and unable to speak a word of Arabic. I really ought to make a thousand apologies for having so confounded ugliness and beauty.'

'Oh, you flatter me, Captain ; but I told you I was not aware

of anyone so exactly resembling myself being in this city, and felt assured you would, ere we parted, discover your error. But I was about to say that I understand you have on board a female of exquisite beauty.'

'An angel, my lord; but how, may I ask, did you gain your information?'

'Why, we who are in power, you know, Captain——'

'Ay, true, my lord, I crave your pardon; it is your duty to become acquainted with every particular.'

'You say wisely, Captain, it is our duty; but I wish, with your permission, to behold the fair one with mine own eyes.'

'Impossible!'

'Impossible, Captain! Why, is she not for sale?'

'She was; but is disposed of.'

'Disposed of, say you? To whom?'

'To the Cotwall.'

Here was a blow to the hopes of the Deewan; his hookah-snake fell from his hands, and he sat like one stupefied, whilst the Captain puffed away with utter unconcern and indifference.

'Captain,' said the Deewan, 'the Cotwall must not have her.'

'But the bargain is made, my lord.'

'Then it must be broken. How much has he agreed to pay?'

'Ten thousand rupees.'

'You shall have twenty.'

'I must not break my word.'

'Thirty.'

'An Arab's word, my lord.'

'Forty.'

'She is yours.

'So much for an Arab's word,' thought Moye-ed-din, at the same time extending his hand to the Arab, who gave it a cordial shake. 'I tell you the truth,' said Moye-ed-din; 'the lady is for the Nuwab, not for myself; therefore you need not fear the consequences of the Cotwall's resentment; rest assured he will not trouble you again with a word on the subject. But as we have an hour to spare, suffer me to accompany you on board your vessel, that I may be able to give a good account to the Nuwab of the lady; and if she answers my expectations, lose no time, but accompany me to the Mahmud-a-baugh palace, where I will introduce you to the Nuwab, to whom I will previously give so glowing an account of the beauties awaiting him, that he will treat you with respect, and close with you for the money.'

'Agreed,' said the Captain; 'let us be off to the vessel.' A boat being ordered to be in readiness, the Captain and the Deewan soon reached the ship, the latter having taken the precaution of muffling himself up in a coarse cloth to avoid discovery; and fortunate indeed was it that he did so, for, on nearing the ship, the Captain espied the Cotwall's treasurer standing on the gangway. 'Curse the fellow,' he cried, 'he is come to claim his fair prize. What is now to be done?'

'Make some excuse, by all means,' said the anxious Moye-ed-din; 'say the lady is sick, and cannot be moved before to-morrow. In the meantime I will sail about the river, apparently unconcerned in the affairs of the ship. Get rid of the Cotwall's fellows

and then hoist a small white flag on your larboard yard-arm, as a signal for me to join you.'

This being agreed upon, the Captain ascended the ship's side, whilst Moye-ed-din pushed off his boat and disappeared. The Captain received the Cotwall's people with politeness, and courtesy, and the treasurer informed him he had brought the money, and was instructed by his master to take charge of the lady. 'Certainly,' said the Captain; 'I will apprise her of your intentions.' So saying, he went below to the great cabin, and after a little time returned, saying he really must beg a thousand apologies to the Cotwall, but that the lady was so severely indisposed, in consequence of having intemperately partaken of some fruit after her long voyage, that she had earnestly begged him to delay her going on shore until the following day. The treasurer had not a word to say to this plausible tale, but offered the ten thousand rupees, which, however, the Captain declined accepting, saying it would be more convenient for him to receive it on the following morning, upon delivering the fair one into the Cotwall's own hands. The treasurer therefore departed, having fixed the hour for his return the next day.

As soon as the Captain perceived the treasurer safely ashore he hoisted the white flag, which the anxious Moye-ed-din perceiving, tacked and made for the ship. He was received by his friend the Captain, who conducted him to the cabin, and, having previously apprised the lady of his rank, introduced him. If he was charmed with the peep the chink had suffered him to take, how was he now enraptured by the full view of so much transcendent beauty! He

quickly perceived she was a Persian lady of rank, and in the language of her country informed her that his Highness the Nuwab, having heard of her arrival, had purchased her from the Captain, for the purpose of placing her in his seraglio, where she would be considered the choicest flower, and hinted at the probability of the Nuwab making her his lawful wife. The fair captive, dejected and unhappy, uttered not one word in reply, but covered her face with her hands, whilst tears were seen trickling through her taper fingers. The Arab Captain stood perfectly unconcerned, twisting his moustachios, and looking on his fair prize with somewhat less indifference than he would have done upon a bale of cotton or a bag of pepper. Moye-ed-din, being of a more compassionate disposition, endeavoured to soothe the fair mourner, and to reconcile her to her lot, by extolling the virtues of his master, his rank, his wealth, power, and amiable disposition; but finding her still silent, took his leave, accompanied by the Captain.

The time drawing near for the visit to the Nuwab, they stayed no longer on board the vessel than was necessary, and rowing quickly, reached the minister's palace, where he prepared for his first visit to the Nuwab. Palanquins were in readiness; and Moye-ed-din was about to proceed, when he recollected his strangely metamorphosed beard. How mortifying was it to be compelled to appear thus disfigured in the presence of the Nuwab! What was ^ato be done? One half-hour's delay might be the means of his not seeing his master; and the golden opportunity neglected, might irrevocably ruin all his hopes of reinstatement in his good graces. He determined, therefore, to proceed by the road in which was

situated the barber's shop, in the hope that Buxoo, having turned his hair red, might be acquainted with the means of turning it black again.

Accompanied by the Captain, he set off for the Mahmud-abaugh palace, directing his bearers to stop at Buxoo's shop. The bearers accordingly halted at the well-known shaving-place; and the Deewan, apologising to the Captain, assured him he would be with him in a few moments, and alighted from his palanquin. The Deewan, in a low voice, informed him of the effects of his cursed dye, and demanded forthwith his own black beard again. The barber was really concerned at the unfortunate consequences, particularly when he understood his master was about to make his first visit to the Nuwab.

‘ If you will spare a moment, my lord, and condescend to enter my shop, I think I may be able to put all right again. The Deewan followed, and submitted to the operations of the barber, who applied a black mixture, which soon restored the minister's beard to all its former beauty. Pleased beyond measure, he rewarded the barber, and joined his companion, to whom he made many apologies, taking care to muffle up his head, to prevent his observing the sudden change of beard; intending, however, to explain the whole affair, if necessary, as soon as the Persian lady should be safely lodged in the Nuwab's Zenana.

Whilst these personages are proceeding towards the palace in the country we shall take the opportunity of accounting for the Cotwall's solicitude concerning the fair captive on board the Arab ship.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A BEARD.

It has been before stated that the barber, on his return from the Arab ship early in the morning, and previous to his waiting on the Deewan, mentioned to his wife having beheld the most beautiful creature the earth had ever contained ; but not having commanded her to keep the circumstance a secret, she conceived there could be no harm in relating it to a neighbour, should an opportunity present itself. When Buxoo left her to proceed to the Deewan's palace she employed herself in her household duties ; and on looking over some clothes which had been laid by for some time, considered if these were dyed and dressed they would become very serviceable ; and having a small sum of money in hand, determined forthwith to proceed to the dyer's, and accordingly entered old Kuzl-bashee's shop, where she saw him up to his armpits in indigo, apparently employed in some very profitable business.

‘Salaam, Kuzl-bashee,’ said the barber’s wife.

‘Bless you, neighbour!’ replied the dyer.

‘I have brought a few cloths to be dyed, neighbour. When will you let me have them?’

‘Why, truly,’ said the dyer, ‘I have now so much work in hand that I cannot promise to get them ready before ten days hence.’

‘Ten days !’ exclaimed the barber’s wife. ‘Lord knows what may happen before that time ; I may be dead.’

‘Beauty must perish, you know, neighbour,’ said the dyer ; ‘but let us hope yours will bless our eyes yet a little longer.’

‘Psha ! old Kuzl-bashee ; don’t talk nonsense. My beauty, indeed ! If you want to bless your eyes with beauty, go on board the Arab ship just arrived ; there, indeed, is an houri from Paradise.’

‘What say you, a beauty on board the Arab ship ? How came you to be so well-informed ?’

‘Oh ! my husband, long ere you were awake, dressed the Captain’s beard, and peeped at the lady ; his brain is turned by her beauty.’

‘My good woman, don’t believe him ; I have seen her myself ; it is all his exaggeration. Beauty, indeed ! why, she is no more than four feet high, with an African nose, and one of her teeth is broken.’

‘Well, Kuzl-bashec, I thought as much. My husband is terribly given to the marvellous, and thinks every new face a paragon of beauty.’

‘Ah ! well, woman, rest assured she is no beauty. Go home, and I will get your things dyed in a week’s time, if possible. Salaam.’

The woman took her departure ; and on her way gossiped with many a friend, taking care not to mention a syllable about the lady on board the Arab ship, not conceiving the arrival of an ugly woman to be news of any importance whatever. This was exactly as the dyer desired it should be, and for this very purpose,

to stop her babbling, he invented the story of the African nose and broken tooth ; and as soon as she had turned her back put on his coat and repaired to the Cotwall, with whom he had been great friends ever since his dispute with the butcher. The Cotwall readily admitted the dyer, who was on the same footing, and played the same part in his house, as the barber did in that of the minister, if we except the shaving, *et cetera*. In a word, he had become the newsmonger and tale-bearer-in-general to the Cotwall, and was therefore always sure of admittance, at whatever hour he called.

‘Well, Kuzl-bashee,’ said the police magistrate, ‘what news to-day ? Something of importance, I warrant, by your smiles and early appearance.’

‘Give me your ear, my lord,’ said the dyer. ‘A beauty has this day arrived that has dazzled the eyes of the very few who have seen her : such a figure, such a nose, and oh ! such teeth—nature never before or can hereafter mould. Young, beautiful, animated, fair, elegant, and graceful, Paradise alone could have given birth to her.’

‘Have you seen her yourself, Kuzl-bashee ?’

‘No, my lord, I have not been so fortunate ; I was but this minute informed of the circumstance.’

‘Who was your informer ?’

‘The barber, my lord, Buxoo himself, who dressed the beards of the crew, and peeped at the lady.’

‘Go, Kuzl-bashee, on board directly ; take with you your cloths for sale to the sailors. One of my confidential servants shall accompany you, as your assistant in your trade ; and as soon as

he has contrived to get a sight of this houri send him back to me.' So saying he called aloud, 'Ho! there, who waits?' An attendant appearing, the Cotwall desired him to send Sheik Ibrahim to him without delay. He soon made his appearance; and the Cotwall having explained to him the part he was to act, despatched him, in company with the dyer, on board the vessel, which they soon reached; but, notwithstanding all their cunning, failed in obtaining the wished for bird's-eye view of the fair captive. It was one of Sheik Ibrahim's rules never, if possible, to return to his employer with reports of a failure in his missions; consequently he whispered his intentions of proceeding to the Cotwall, to assure him the report of the lady's beauty was by no means exaggerated. Kuzl-bashce approving the plan, favoured it by ordering his companion to go on shore and fetch some more cloths, that the Arabs might have a greater number to select from. Off went Sheik Ibrahim, and found the Cotwall anxiously expecting him.

'Well, Sheik Ibrahim, is it all true?'

'More than true, by Allah: she is indeed divinely beautiful.'

'Fine eyes?'

'Transcendently so!'

'Fair complexion?'

'Alabaster!'

'Figure?'

'Graceful beyond conception!'

'Sheik Ibrahim, we must negociate for this lady. Send hither my treasurer and dobash. Away! lose not a moment.'

Whilst all this was passing at the Cotwall's house old Kuzl-

bashee was making his bargains with the Arab sailors, until his attention was withdrawn by the smell of the perfumer, as has been already related, together with his attempt to accompany the barber and his companion on their return to the city.

It is now necessary to make the reader further acquainted with the plans and intentions of Noor Mahommed, the Cotwall. This able magistrate, having obtained the Nuwab's favour, was assiduous beyond measure in endeavouring to secure it; and for this purpose, knowing the only successful road towards his good graces was by adding a fresh beauty to his harem, he had night and day strove to find one worthy his acceptance. Upon this duty old Sheik Ibrahim had been often employed; and no sooner had a report of a beauty reached the Cotwall's ears than he despatched this able scout to bring him a faithful account of the truth or otherwise of the rumour. How faithfully he performed his duty we have already had a specimen. Never did he say that he had failed in his embassy; no, he would rather entertain his master with a long history of the perils and difficulties he had encountered, and the artifices he had practised, in order to get a sight of the particular lady on whose charms he was to report.

In fact, Sheik Ibrahim, although he possessed the talent of convincing his master he was a clever fellow, and the most likely man to succeed in his business, was of all others the most unfit for the duty required of him; and in nine cases out of ten his embassies were unsuccessful. In such cases he would, after magnifying the dangers by which he had been surrounded, end his history by a woful catalogue of defects in the lady's person. The Cotwall, never dreaming but that the old fellow had really seen

the lady, of whose defects he appeared to give so minute a detail, invariably rewarded him. Such deceit he could successfully practise when employed at a distance, but in the present instance the lady in question was within a stone's throw of his master's house ; he dared not therefore now deceive him, lest the Cotwall himself by any accident should obtain a sight of the female, or hear reports from all quarters of her transcendent beauty. Trusting, therefore, to the word of the dyer, who said he had heard the report from the barber himself, Sheik Ibrahim ventured to confirm the statement with all the epithets he had ever heard applied to beauty. In consequence the Cotwall directed his treasurer to treat with the Arab Captain, who consented to sell the lady for ten thousand rupees, which the Cotwall agreed to, knowing the Nuwab would repay him with interest. Noor Mahommed was the more anxious to furnish the Nuwab with an accomplished beauty, because he well knew his enemy, the Deewan, was engaged in the same honourable employment. Which of these two worthies bears off the prize will soon be known. Kuzl-bashee, not having been able to fathom the mystery of the strange perfumer, returned, and wisely held his tongue on the subject.

We must now turn our attention to the Mahmud-a-baugh palace, in the gardens of which the Nuwab was expecting the arrival of the fallen Deewan ; and as doubtless the reader is somewhat curious to learn to what fortunate chance the hitherto neglected Moya-ed-din was indebted for this sudden summons into the presence of his master, we shall go back to the time when the delighted minister desired his servant to prepare a sumptuous dinner, as he expected a friend to partake of it. The servant

entered the presence with a low bow; but on looking up, how great was his surprise at beholding his master with an unseemly carrotty beard, instead of the long and glossy black one with which his chin was wont to be adorned ! This, together with the unpleasant and too powerful smell of perfumes, could not fail setting his tongue loose as soon as he had retired from the apartment. He had already acquainted two of his fellow-servants with the strange metamorphosis, when he was again quickly summoned to the anderoon, or private apartments, where he was desired to bring lime-juice and salt. Curious to find out for what purpose these articles were required, he peeped through the half-closed door, and there beheld his master washing, soaping, and salting his beard, until, exhausted by fatigue, he sank on a couch and vanished from the servant's sight.

Ahmed Khan, so was the servant named, soon joined his companions, and very seriously informed them their master was mad ; and when he related all he had seen, everyone was of the same opinion. It happened that Ahmed Khan's mother commanded a company of females in the Nuwab's Zenana ; and as egress was allowed these faithful matrons, she frequently visited her son Ahmed Khan at the Decwan's palace : she this day appeared, and with real concern heard the dreadful news of the derangement of poor Moya-ed-din's intellects.

On her return to the Zenana she spread the news, by which means it reached the ears of the Nuwab himself. 'Poor Moya-ed-din !' said he, 'I have been too harsh with you ; my neglect hath, I fear, turned thee mad. Yet I will not allow this, if thou art not already too far gone. Unhappy, erring man ! I will this day see

thee, and soothe thy sorrows.' Independent of this benevolent inclination, the Nuwab was most curious to see the carroty beard with which his insanity had prompted him to adorn himself. A messenger was accordingly dispatched to the Deewan, whose duty we have seen faithfully performed.

It was in the evening that the ex-minister was announced to the Nuwab. The sun had not yet retired below the western horizon, and the mighty delegate was smoking his hookah in a spacious verandah, overlooking the garden. Moye ed-din having entered the presence, fell on his face, and kissing the hem of his master's garment, arose ; when, to the disappointment of the Nuwab, he beheld, not the carroty beard he had been led to expect, but a fine black one, the same he had seen six months before. Imagining the whole story was a trick to work upon his feelings, he rather repented having summoned Moye-ed-din to his presence. The extreme humility, however, of his minister prevailed, and the Nuwab entered into conversation with him, animadverting rather severely on the cause of his misfortunes ; and though Moye-ed-din heard not one word by which he could dare to construe any intention of reinstatement in his former office, yet he imagined he perceived a favourable moment to inform the Nuwab of the great beauty lately arrived, and requested permission to mention a circumstance of importance.

The Nuwab postponed the hearing, as the sun had set, and it was proper they should recite their prayers and go through their ablutions. Water being brought, the Nuwab and Moye-ed-din, sitting opposite each other, commenced praying and washing. Moye-ed-din, with closed eyes, muttered over his prayers with

great earnestness, but was aroused from his composed state of mind by hearing the Nuwab set up a loud and hearty laugh, which greatly amazed him ; but casting his eyes on his own beard, all surprise vanished, for there once more appeared his abominable carrotty hair, whilst the water in which he had washed was as black as ink. His chagrin was so great as to deprive him of utterance, and he sat the picture of disappointment and vexation; the Nuwab, nearly bursting his sides with laughter, crying out, ‘ It is true, it is true ! Oh, Moye-ed-din, Moye-ed-din! why have you done this? What could induce you to spoil so grand a beard ? ’

‘ Patience, your highness, and I will tell you all. My beard is connected with the circumstance I was about to mention previous to commencing our ablutions ; with permission I will now relate the same.’ The Nuwab giving a nod of assent, Moye-ed-din faithfully related all the events of that day, and the Nuwab laughed heartily at the ingenuity of the barber by the application of his different dyes. He was particularly pleased with the exertions of the Deewan for his interest, and desired the Captain might be introduced to him.

The Arab, being ushered into the presence of the Nuwab, made the usual obeisance, and the business was quickly entered into, and the bargain made. The Deewan recommended that the state barge should instantly be despatched to the ship, for the purpose of bringing the fair captive to the city palace, saying, ‘ For, your highness, notwithstanding my exertions for you, my lord and master, the Cotwall has presumed to thwart me, and attempted to secure the lady for himself.’

The Arab Captain confirming this assertion, the Nuwab was highly incensed against the Cotwall, and determined to evince his displeasure on the first opportunity.

The order on the treasury being drawn out for the price of the Persian lady, the Captain and his friend the Deewan took their departure ; and when fairly out of the palace, the former could not help saying, ‘In the name of wonder, my lord, what sort of beard is yours? It seems to me to change colour every hour of the day : it is first red, then black, then red again.’

The Deewan now enjoyed a hearty laugh, the first he had indulged in for six months ; and, in a few words, related the adventures of the day.

‘Then you were the perfumer, after all!’ said the Captain. ‘I thought I could not be mistaken.’

‘Oh, but you know, Captain, where was the similitude? The height, the broad flat nose, eh, Captain?’

‘Why, truly, my lord, I really was puzzled how to conduct myself, my sense of duty and my sense of perception warred so violently in my bosom. I felt assured the perfumer was you, but could not reconcile it to myself how you could be the perfumer, being indisputably the Deewan of his highness the Nuwab.’

Moye-ed-din determined, on his return, to call at the barber’s, and abuse him for the second trick he had played him, and gave orders accordingly. As soon as the bearers halted before the shaving-shop the obsequious Buxoo made his appearance, when, beholding the red beard of his master, he exclaimed, ‘Allah be praised! is it possible?’

‘Yes, it is possible; and it is also probable that you will get

the bastinado to-morrow. How dare you thus impose upon me with your jet-black dye, which, the moment it was touched with water——

‘With water!’ exclaimed the terrified Buxoo; ‘oh, that is a very different thing: my black dye won’t stand water. How could I imagine you would use water on a visit of ceremony? Water, my lord! no, no, my black dye won’t stand water.’

‘I heartily wish your red dye would not stand water, for, by Mahommed! I have been at it, with both hot and cold water, soap, salt, and lime-juice, for a full hour; and here it is just in the same state. But, hark ye, my friend: you must rectify your mistake, or, by Allah! it would have been better for you never to have touched a hair of my head.’

The barber was convinced, from the authoritative tone of his master, he had become reinstated in the Nuwab’s good graces; and therefore promised, before morning, to find out some drug which would remove the stain, so intolerable to behold.

This memorable day closed with bringing the fair Persian to the palace of the Nuwab, and she was duly admitted into the Zenana.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OBDURATE BEAUTY.

THE barber failed not to appear on the following morning before his master, the Deewan, bringing with him some liquid in a small phial, which he quickly applied to the unfortunate carrotty beard, assuring his noble employer that a daily application for a week would entirely remove the filthy red, and cause the beard to appear in all its pristine beauty. Moyc-ed-din, impatient to a degree, imagining one application would have the desired effect, received the barber's recipe with an angry growl of disappointment. Buxoo being fully prepared for the clouded brow of his master, had previously planned an antidote, and took the earliest opportunity of congratulating the Deewan on his success in his plans, concluding with representing the Cotwall's anger, mortification, and distress in such colours as he knew would greatly delight his hearer.

'Oh, my lord!' said he, 'the distresses you have suffered regarding *your* beard are nothing compared to what the Cotwall has undergone with his. Would you believe it? so great was his rage, that he has actually plucked his beard out by the roots, and is now obliged to feign sickness until it grows again; so that after all a red beard is better than none at all.'

The Deewan could not help enjoying a hearty laugh at the

Cotwall's distress, attributable to his (the Deewan's) superior skill and adroitness.

'Well, Buxoo,' said he, 'we made a good job of it; and as I am indebted to you for the first information on the subject, I must even pardon you for the mistakes you have made in your abominable dyes, hoping, in a few days, to see no more red hairs on my chin. But will the Cotwall's beard ever grow again, think you?'

'Not for a length of time, my lord; and at present the effect of his violence on his poor chin has so inflamed the flesh, that his whole face is enveloped in a filthy poultice, so that he can neither eat or drink.'

'Excellent, Buxoo, excellent!' cried the gratified Deewan, enjoying another and more hearty laugh than before.

The barber took his leave, having expressed his anxiety for the speedy renovation of his master's most sacred beard.

The Cotwall, in the meantime, though not so deeply chagrined or so violently enraged as to destroy his beard and lacerate his chin, was nevertheless sorely vexed at the failure of his schemes; and fancying all the city were acquainted with the affair, feigned sickness, and shut himself up in his *anderun*, or private apartments. Buxoo, knowing this, thought he might with safety invent the story of the torn beard and mangled face, rightly conjecturing such information would be best calculated to reconcile the Deewan to his own misfortune.

The Nuwab was amazed at the beauty of the fair Persian, who, from her dazzling appearance, he called Mheitab.¹ The dejection

¹ Moonshine.

and melancholy, however, which were ever visible on the countenance of this newly-acquired ornament of the harem, greatly damped the delight of the Nuwab, who, in the hope of its wearing off as she became reconciled to her situation, had never as yet ventured to intrude upon her privacy; and when he did occasionally gratify his eyes by a sight of her, conducted himself in the most respectful and attentive manner. Mheitab hitherto had only suffered monosyllables to escape her lips, maintaining a melancholy yet dignified reserve towards all who came near her. The Nuwab, unable to account for such persevering indifference towards his attentions, summoned Moyc-ed-din, his Deewan.

The description of the beauty of Mheitab, the fair Persian, was by no means exaggerated by the barber, who had seen her, or by Sheik Ibrahim, who had not been so fortunate. She was tall, graceful, and elegant, apparently about seventeen years of age, with the most delicately fair complexion, tinged with the huc of the rose; the finest and most exquisitely shaped nose; with sparkling black eyes, and a remarkably fine set of the whitest teeth. Possessed of all these rare and fascinating beauties, it was certainly most mortifying to her possessor to discover she would make no use of her tongue.

On the arrival of the man who had provided him with this taciturn beauty the Nuwab thus addressed him:

‘Why, Moye-ed-din, your beauty won’t speak!’

‘Your highness,’ replied Moye-ed-din, ‘is pleased to be facetious regarding my beauty. I confess that scoundrel of a barber has ruined it, I fear, beyond redemption; but, as he has not deprived me of my speech, I was about to enquire after your

highness's health, when you were pleased to remind me of my unfortunate beard.'

'Ha, ha ! Moya-ed-din, you will kill me with laughter !' said the Nuwab, unable for some time to compose his risible faculties. 'I see your beard is not restored to its wonted beauty, but, Allah be praised ! you can yet speak, and would that were the case with all under my roof. I called you, not to find fault with *your* beauty, but with the beautiful Persian lady for whom I paid so vast a sum. She won't speak a word to anyone, and this is most provoking, as I intend to make her my wife.'

'My surprise,' said the Deewan, 'is so great, that I am really puzzled to find words to express it. Is it possible the magnificence of your palace, the attentions of all around her, and above all, the honour intended her, should fail to dispel her melancholy or assuage her grief ?'

'I was never informed,' said the Nuwab, 'of her melancholy and grief—that is twenty thousand rupees off her price.'

'True, your highness, I did not mention the state in which I found her on board the ship, feeling convinced, when she was once placed in your Zenana, all remembrance of her sorrow would vanish, like dew before the sun. But has your highness actually condescended to make her the offer of your hand ?'

'I have not,' replied the Nuwab.

'Then, if your slave may advise, do so without delay—such an honour might let loose the tongues of all the houris in Paradise.'

'It shall be so, Moya-ed-din. Appear to-morrow at this time, and you shall hear the result. But, Moya-ed-din, I have not seen you at Durbar ; how is this ?'

‘ I waited your highness’s commands on the subject.’

‘ Attend, then,’ said the Nuwab, ‘ and confine your attention to politics and revenue concerns: leave justice in my hands. You may retire.’

Moye-ed-din, glad enough to get into the Durbar once more, on any terms, bowed most respectfully, and withdrew. In the meantime, Jelal-ed-deen visited the fair Persian, and formally made her an offer of his hand, upon which the tongue of the distressed lady, as Moye-ed-din had imagined, became loosened, and she thus replied :

‘ So distinguished an honour, my lord, cannot be heard in silence ; it would be ungrateful, even in a princess, to be dumb with so noble a suitor at her feet, and for me, therefore, your slave, it would be the height of insolence and contempt. Believe me, your highness, I am not the mistress of my own fate. I cannot, were I ever so willing, give you an answer at present—it depends upon the stars of heaven when I shall be permitted to accept or refuse your noble offer. But, that you may know when to expect my reply, summon your astrologers and learned men to your ^{palace} ~~anderun~~, and suffer me, from behind the lattice, to put to them several questions; and the time for my reply to your present offer must depend upon their answers.’

The Nuwab, amazed at the delicious harmony of her voice, together with the fluency of her speech, sat for some time unable to utter a word. He felt he was in the presence of a woman far superior to all he had ever beheld. Her mysterious application for the astrologers both astonished and alarmed him, for he considered the probability of their answers being unfavourable to him.

After some time, however, he granted her request, and appointed the following day for the assembly of the learned men. Having obtained her wishes, the fair lady again sat wrapt in a silence and meditation which baffled all attempts at interruption. The Nuwab, therefore, withdrew, to ponder on the conduct of the strange being in his possession.

On the following morning Moye-ed-din appeared at the Durbar, notwithstanding his parti-coloured beard; for poor Buxoo, although he had practised all his ingenuity, and bestowed more pains and trouble on it than he had ever done to any beard before in his life, still was unable to bring his work to perfection, and was at last compelled to administer the remedy of patience to his noble master, advising him to wait for a fresh crop of hair, which must, of course, be black and glossy. Moye-ed-din, seeing no chance of success by any other means, wisely determined to bestow no more trouble or thought on the business, and thus, apparently unconcerned, stalked into the Durbar.

The Nuwab was thoughtful and dejected the whole time, and after the hour of twelve, when the court broke up, beckoned Moye-ed-din into his *anderun*, to the surprise of all present, who exclaimed, 'He is indeed once more in high favour!' Moye-ed-din was soon informed of the request of the fair Persian to have all the learned men in the city assembled before her, and the only difficulty he saw was (though he did not express it), the very few wise men the city contained. Under the government of the former Nuwab there were astrologers, geometricians, architects, and able mathematicians, but now their places were supplied by pretended magicians, poltroons, and panders.

‘Summon before us all our astronomers and learned men,’ said the Nuwab.

‘All shall appear,’ replied the obedient Deewan, and he retired to execute his commands. Alas ! he knew but of one who had any pretension to skill in astronomy, and the production of him even might be attended with unpleasant if not dangerous consequences, lest the Persian lady should prove the better astronomer of the two.

Moyc-ed-din was greatly perplexed in this business. Would the Nuwab believe his whole city contained but one astronomer, and that one a Brahmin ? Would he credit the fact, that of all the learned Mahommedans, for which the city had been celebrated under his father’s government, not one remained ? In fact, the Deewan durst not produce his single wise man, lest the Nuwab might consider his solitary appearance a reproach to himself for his neglect of literature and science ; on the other hand, although it would be an easy matter to deceive his master by the introduction of a band of long-bearded ignoramuses, yet he feared the fair Persian would not so readily be imposed upon, and he should then inevitably incur the wrath of him whom it was at this time his particular wish to please. The Deewan succeeded in obtaining two days’ time to assemble the learned men, determining, in his own mind, not to be idle in the interim.

‘Could I,’ thought he, ‘but divine what questions would be put to the astrologers, or what answers would be best calculated to ensure my master speedy possession of the fair interrogator, a bribe might so effectually jostle all the stars together, and so disarrange the heavenly order of the planets, as to terminate

this affair to his entire satisfaction ;' but as the object of the lady was involved in obscurity, it was impossible for Moye-ed-din to bespeak an answer either one way or the other. The intention of the fair Persian must be, he considered, either dispatch or delay ; and as no part of her conduct seemed to justify the idea of the former, he determined, if possible, to thwart her in her expectations of the latter.

The attendance of the learned had been so long dispensed with, and their requisition in the present times altogether so great a novelty, that Moye-ed-din was perplexed to whom he should apply concerning such people, if any there were within reach. Mhadeo Gúrú, the Brahmin, he knew lived in a retired part of the city, and still devoted his time to the study of the heavenly bodies, and was consulted by all the Hindoos, far and near ; of the existence of any other, who had any pretensions to the science of astronomy, he was entirely ignorant.

After deeply considering to whom he should apply for information on the subject, he could hit upon no one from whom he could obtain it but the Cotwall, who, from his intimate knowledge of all classes of persons in the bazaar and environs, could doubtless assist him in the business ; yet when he called to mind their recent differences, and the hatred which the Cotwall bore him, owing to many circumstances, he considered it peculiarly galling to him to solicit his aid in any shape whatever. What polite requests could not accomplish, however, he knew stern authority could ; taking up his pen, therefore, he drew up an order on the Cotwall to assemble all the learned men and astrologers he could collect in the city and suburbs and forward

them to the palace of the minister, for the purpose of presenting them, after two days, to the Nuwab. Ere he despatched this order it was necessary to obtain the seal and signature of the Nuwab, which, however, he delayed applying for until he should have had an interview with Mhadeo Gúrú, whom he hoped to secure on his side, trusting that all who might be associated with him, knowing his superior skill and ability, would *unâ voce* coincide with his opinions and decisions: for this purpose he despatched a messenger to the Gúrú, requesting his attendance immediately.

Noor Mahommed Cotwall, in the meantime, having emerged from his anderun, whither he had confined himself, to recover from the mortification he had experienced by the interference of Moye-ed-din with his purchase of the Persian lady, heard the report of the requisition of the astrologers; and fully aware how ignorant the Deewan was respecting this class of persons, sat in state anticipating his request in person to assist him in his search for them. 'Yes,' thought he, 'he shall learn to know my consequence, and how requisite I am to his welfare; he has received the order to provide the astrologers, and must obey by the given time: it is not enough to place him under obligation to me; no, I will plunge into, not extricate him from, difficulties; I will promise but not perform. What answer can he then give for neglecting his orders? He will be again turned down the hill of favour, whilst I triumphantly shall reach its summit.'

We must leave the Cotwall to enjoy his dreams of promotion, and turn to the visit of the Brahmin to his lordship the Deewan.

The messenger of Moye-ed-din, although he had, in the

presence of his master, professed an accurate knowledge of the residence of the Gúrú, was, in reality, entirely ignorant of the matter, and on quitting the palace determined to ask the first person he met with to direct him to the astronomer's abode. The man whom he first stumbled upon chanced to be Sheik Ibrahim, the Cotwall's Mercury, who was prowling about for want of some other employment.

'Hark ye, brother,' said the messenger, 'know you where lives Mhadeo Gúrú, the Brahmin astronomer?'

'Do I know? There's a question! Why, I know everything and everybody—so many years as I have lived——'

'Be quick, then,' said the messenger, 'and direct me, without loss of time.'

'Heydey! why this violent hurry, brother? Any calamity in your master's family?'

'None whatever; God forbid! only my time is precious; so tell me, if you please; if not, I will make my salaam.'

'Oh, I have no objection to tell you; only why should you object to inform me why you are sent in quest of the Brahmin?'

'I do not object, brother, but I don't know myself; I am sent to call him to the palace.'

'Well, then, you will find him at home; but where that is you had better enquire elsewhere, for confound me if I know.' So saying, he tripped down a narrow alley and disappeared, leaving the messenger to repent his lost time. The necessary information, however, he obtained at the shaving-shop of the all-knowing Buxoo, and proceeded in breathless haste to the obscure dwelling of the Gúrú.

‘Ram, Ram, Mharaj!’ bellowed the Mussulman, Hircarrah, from a distance, not venturing to approach the sacred dwelling of the Brahmin. The door was opened by a fat, sleek, portly man, who enquired what he wanted. The man delivered his message, on hearing which the Brahmin expressed his readiness to follow him without loss of time, which he accordingly did. Moye-ed-din, soon after the messenger had quitted his presence, considering the time which would be lost before the seal and signature of the Nuwab could be affixed to the Cotwall’s order, accordingly determined to take his own draft that moment to the Nuwab, and beg him to stamp it with that signet which none dare disobey. All this he was enabled to do, and return home, owing to his Hircarrah’s delay, before the Brahmin appeared. As soon as that learned person had crossed his threshold the order to the Cotwall was dispatched, with instructions to the bearer to wait for an answer.

The Deewan received the Brahmin with profound respect, informing him that he had troubled him upon no ordinary affair, but one of the highest importance; and having heard of his learning and skill in astronomy, had determined to avail himself of it. He then briefly informed the Gúrú of the order he had received from the Nuwab to collect all the learned men of the city; but that knowing only of one, and that one the Brahmin himself, he had as far as he had been able executed his commands.

‘I trust, therefore, Mharaj,’ said he, addressing his visitor, ‘that you will not only give me the benefit of your skill, but also supply me with a few more of your caste, who, if not equally

learned with yourself, have sufficient wisdom to coincide with your decrees.'

'On what subject am I to be consulted?'

'The stars.'

'A heavenly and a knotty affair indeed! Does the Nuwab understand the stars?'

'Not in the least; he merely knows the sun from the moon.'

'Surely, he knows the Great Bear and the Milky Way?'

'Truly not.' 'Nor the Dog-star, nor Soheily,¹ nor Aldubrun,² nor Puroveen?'³

'No! indeed, I question whether he has ever heard of them.'

'Well, then, do you wish me to instruct or deceive?'

'Why, by the Prophet! I don't know what I wish you to do. The fact is, there is a lady in his harem far more skilled, I suspect, than any male being about court. She pretends to be unable to give an answer to the Nuwab's offer of marriage until she has consulted the wise men and astronomers of the city. *Her* object, I suspect, is delay; *my* object is to disappoint her. Should she, therefore, enquire when certain stars shall rise or fall, or when any particular event shall happen, I require you to name an early day for the event.'

'But, my lord, I cannot control the stars.'

'True; but you can control your tongue, and make it say week for month, or month for year.'

'But she may discover the fraud.'

'Impossible! She must be ignorant on the points she wishes to be informed upon, or why summon the astronomers at all?'

¹ Canopus.

² Bull.

³ Pleiades.

‘But a Brahmin, my lord, must not speak an untruth.’

‘Nor shall you find a Mahomedan guilty of a lie; for if you succeed I promise you a reward.’

‘Stay, my lord; what reward can recompense me for the disgraces heaped upon our holy caste? Formerly we enjoyed our lands rent-free, our cattle paid no toll for customs, our——’

‘Your land, Mharaj, shall be exempt from rent, your cattle from customs—all shall be as you desire.’

‘Then, my lord, is not my place in society, my rank in Durbar, usurped by that most ignorant of all men, Ibn-al-Agib, surnaming himself Muntak?’¹

‘The booby shall no longer rank before you; I will so magnify your learning, that I will shame the Nuwab of his prejudice in favour of that contemptible fellow.’

‘Well, my lord, with this understanding the stars may be propitious to your wishes; but, to avoid suspicion, I must bring with me several of my own caste, who shall echo my words, and leave no doubt on the minds of our hearers of the correctness of our decisions.’

‘Exactly what I require,’ said the Decwan. ‘In two days’ time be ready, with your followers, at the Nuwab’s palace.’

‘Stay, my lord. There is yet another point which it will be our interest to provide against, namely, the clashing of opinions of the learned; for Ibn-al-Agib will doubtless be among us, and he invariably differs in opinion from myself.’

‘True; but surely his single voice against a conclave of learned Brahmins will avail but little?’

¹ Astronomer.

‘My lord, what you say is correct. His single voice is not to be dreaded, but, like a star of the first magnitude, he will come attended by a rabble of satellites, who receive his word as law. It will be policy, therefore, on your part, as soon as I am gone, to summon this fellow and secure him on our side; and rely on it for a bribe he will for once coincide with me on every point; only, on no account have any further communication with me previous to the assembly.’

‘It shall be done, Mharaj; I see my way clearly, Brahmin. I thank thee. Farewell! and rely on my promises of reward.’

‘Ay, my lord; remember the land, the cattle, and my rank and precedence.’

‘All shall be as you desire.’

The Brahmin made his obeisance and retired.

Moye-ed-din, rejoicing in the success likely to attend his plans, dispatched a messenger for Ibn-al-Agib, for whom he had prepared a ponderous bag of rupees, imagining the sight of so much money would instantly bind the old fellow to his service. The messenger, however, returned with the mortifying intelligence of Ibn-al-Agib having been summoned by the Cotwall, in whose house he still remained.

‘Am I ever to be thwarted by this Cotwall?’ said Moye-ed-din, when the messenger had retired. ‘Curse and confound his officiousness!’

He now repented his haste in dispatching the order upon which the Cotwall was now unquestionably acting. In the hope, if bribes had been offered to old Ibn-al-Agib, he might, by offering larger sums, secure his services, he dispatched another mes-

senger to his house to await his return home, and then bring him to his presence. But hour after hour passed, and still he returned not; and every messenger was the bearer of the mortifying intelligence that Ibn-al-Agib had not returned home since his visit to the Cotwall. To account for this we must turn to the bazaar and the proceedings of the implacable Noor Mahommed, leaving the Deewan to retire to rest; it being midnight, and no chance of his having an interview with the Mahommedan astronomer before the next day.

CHAPTER VII.

RIVAL ASTROLOGERS.

IT will be remembered that the messenger sent in quest of the Brahmin unfortunately met old Sheik Ibrahim, who, after confessing his ignorance of the Gúrí's abode, scampered down a narrow lane and disappeared. Satisfied there was some deep plan on foot, he hastened to his old master, the Cotwall, and made him acquainted with his bit of news, for which he was praised and rewarded. Noor Mahommed at first imagined the Deewan, unwilling to lay himself under obligations to him, was endeavouring to ferret out the astronomers himself. The haughty order of the Deewan being soon after put into his hands, he determined to obey it strictly, but in such a manner as he conceived would completely frustrate the schemes of his enemy; he therefore instantly summoned old Ibn-al-Agib, the Muntak; not that he had any instructions to give him, but to prevent the Deewan availing himself of his assistance by any underhand means, similar to those he might be employing with the Brahmin. Accordingly, the old fellow made his appearance, and was received with respect by the Cotwall, who informed him that he might presently require his aid; but as he was not then prepared to express his wishes, begged he would be seated, and hold himself in readiness to enter his

presence when required to do so. The astronomer bowed assent, and the Cotwall left him to his meditations.

Ibn-al-Agib, or the Son of the Wonderful, which was the pompous title this man was pleased to bestow on himself, was a Mahommedan of low origin, a native of Agra. His father had followed the profession of a pylewan, or wrestler, and from his great strength, and being also a skilful gladiator, was denominated Agib the Wonderful. Our astronomer was his only son (whose true name was Bappoo), a boy of a puny and weakly condition, which prevented his following his father's profession; he consequently commenced earning his livelihood by becoming monkey-leader to a company of snake-men and jugglers. The duties of his profession caused his entire separation from his father, whom he never either loved or respected. Amongst the company of strollers with whom he had connected himself was an outcast Hindoo, who had contrived to become acquainted with the names of the stars, and by their means pretended to inform the ignorant of the future events of their lives.

Young Agib, or rather Bappoo, from occasionally being the conjurer's boy, necessarily imbibed some of the conjurer's knowledge, and foretold eclipses of the sun and moon with tolerable accuracy. By the time his company reached Surat he had, he conceived, obtained sufficient knowledge to set up for himself; he accordingly deserted his former associates, and took a lodging in the most obscure part of the city. For a length of time he remained unnoticed and unknown. At that particular period there appeared an eager thirst for knowledge amongst all classes of people, and it so happened that a Mahommedan astronomer hired

the upper apartments of the very house in which our aspiring youth had taken up his abode. He soon introduced himself to the notice of the new lodger, and through his acquaintance added greatly to his slender store of knowledge ; but what tended to improve him most was his attending the astronomer to the weekly meetings of the cognoscenti of the age, where all their discoveries were made known to each other, and learned debates held on important subjects.

Ibn-al-Agib was now the name he chose to assume, carrying, he imagined, with it more weight than simple Bappoo. This Son of the Wonderful made up with cunning and duplicity of mind the deficiency of strength and activity of body, and through such means was he indebted for his advancement. One fine starlight night, as he was about to enter the apartment of his fellow-lodger, having gently half-opened the door, he discovered his friend standing at the window, engaged in scrutinising the starry canopy of heaven, and muttering to himself as if making some wonderful discovery, and yet as if doubting his own senses. ‘ Yes,’ said he, ‘ it must be, it is, by Mahommed ! ’tis a comet ! ’ Ibn-al-Agib waited to hear no more, but sliding down stairs, gained the street, and placing himself in the most public situation, directed his whole attention to the quarter whence his friend had espied the comet. He was quickly surrounded with boys and men of all classes, and when he conceived enough had assembled to witness his great skill and quickness of perception he rushed from them, crying aloud, ‘ A comet, a comet ! oh, glorious sight ! I have discovered a comet.’ His friend, the real discoverer of the phenomenon, hearing the cry of ‘ A comet ! ’ looked out of the window, and perceived Agib running

to and fro, as if mad with delight. 'Well,' thought the astronomer, 'how stupid I must have been to have doubted the truth of what I saw, when this ignorant fellow has spied it out, perhaps, long ago! Agib had the assurance to run up stairs to his fellow-lodger, and in breathless haste exclaimed, 'Oh, brother! I have discovered a comet! Come to the window and look; I will show it to you.'

'I know it, brother,' said the astronomer; 'I discovered it an hour ago.'

'Yes, yes, but you heard my cry in the street first, and then it was easy enough to see the comet; it must, you knew, be somewhere. Well, but it is a glorious sight, is it not? There, there is its tail: when I first saw it, three hours ago, it had scarcely any tail perceptible.'

'Three hours ago, Agib? 'Tis impossible!'

'Impossible! why? I have an eye for discovery, and was on the look-out, judging, from the moon's appearance last night, some wonderful sight would gratify my eyes. Don't you remember the speck in the moon?'

'I do, certainly; but how that could prognosticate a comet I am at a loss to understand.'

'You may be sure some wonderful phenomenon will appear whenever that speck is visible. But I must away and make my observations.'

So saying, he rushed from the house, leaving his friend to curse his own stupidity in not being beforehand with his ignorant fellow-lodger in promulgating the discovery. Ever since that time the name of Agib became celebrated as an astronomer, and people dated events from the appearance of Agib's comet, as it

was invariably denominated. When the real learned and scientific men deserted Surat, Agib wisely remained, and, in the absence of all the rest, was considered the best and most learned astronomer in the city amongst the Mahommedans ; whilst the Hindoos of course adhered to their most learned Brahmin, Mhadeo Gúrú, whom they consulted, giving implicit faith to all his warnings and prognostications. Such was the character of Ibn-al-Agib, astronomer of Surat ; and a man better suited to the Cotwall's purpose could perhaps have nowhere else been found.

Noor Mahommed Cotwall, stung to the quick by the receipt of the Deewan's order, was more anxious than ever to thwart him as much as lay in his power ; he therefore summoned Ibn-al-Agib into his presence, and ere he proceeded to business drew from his strong box a heavy bag of rupees ; and throwing them with violence upon the ground, the crash spoke volumes to the needy astronomer.

‘What a sum, my lord !’ said he,

‘All is yours, Agib, if you do as I desire you.’

‘Oh ! my lord, what services can I render you to be deserving of so immense a reward?’

The Cotwall briefly explained to him the order of the Deewan, and the intrigues which he suspected were going on.

‘Well, my lord, what am I to do?’ enquired the anxious Agib.

‘Why, that is what I want to know from you, Agib, for in truth I know not how to instruct you ; only I know what you must not do.’

‘What?’

‘You must make it a point to differ from the Gúrú and his

conclave in every particular. If they say the sun is the sun, you must maintain it is the moon.'

'I am ready, my lord. But what end will this childish contradiction answer?'

'That is no business of yours : do as I command you, and the money is your own.'

'This business, my lord, must be managed so as not to suffer our hearers to suppose I differ from a spirit of pride or opposition, but from the result of my experience and superior knowledge. Now, it requires very profound reasoning to prove black to be white, and therefore——'

'Don't preach to me,' said the impatient police-master ; 'you know my wishes, and you see your reward.'

'I am ever obedient, my lord, and will do my best ; and if I have not reason on my side, will supply the defect by noise and the outcry of voices ; as I have a dozen faithful adherents, who will joyfully echo my words, be they ever so absurd.'

'That is just what I want : confound the opposite party, stun the ears of your auditors, and leave the matter just as much in the dark as it is now ; and then return for your money. One thing you must consent to.'

'Name it,' said Agib.

'You must not return home until the whole affair is settled.'

'Why?'

'Ask no questions, but obey me.'

The astronomer professed his willingness to attend to the orders of the Cotwall, but urged the necessity of summoning one or two of his attendants, to give them their cue how to proceed

at the appointed time. To this the Cotwall assented; and this being done, Agib was secreted at a distance, and returned not home; and this accounts for the anxious Deewan's disappointment, and the vexatious reports of his messengers.

In vain did Moye-ed-din, on the following day, dispatch messenger after messenger to summon Ibn-al-Agib—he was nowhere to be found; and to give a colouring to his absence it was industriously rumoured that he had gone out to sea to take observations. However Moye-ed-din might, in his own mind, be convinced to the contrary, he was certainly unable, by proof, to contradict the report. In this dilemma he would, but for the Brahmin's positive injunctions to the contrary, have once more summoned him to arrange their proceedings, in consequence of the absence of Ibn-al-Agib.

The day arrived when the rival astrologers were to give their answers to the questions of the fair Persian.

Moye-ed-din, foreseeing the failure of his plan, repaired to the Durbar with an unusual solemnity; and although many difficult cases demanded his attention, he could think of nothing but the result of the astronomers' decisions. His ingenuity prompted him to suggest to the Nuwab a plan, which, if adopted, would completely confuse and subvert the intentions of the Cotwall and his party; he, therefore, took the opportunity, ere Durbar broke up, to solicit permission to follow the Nuwab into his *anderun*. Having obtained a favourable nod, no sooner was business concluded than he waited upon his master, and represented to him that it appearing there were two sorts of astronomers in the city, who invariably, through pride or ill-will, differed in each other's

opinions, consequently their joint appearance would only tend to create confusion, without the possibility of decision; he, therefore, humbly proposed that the questions of the fair Persian should be committed to writing, and delivered to, first, the leader and chief of the Brahmin sect; and secondly, to the chief of the Mahomedans. The Nuwab having no objection, retired to consult Mheitab on the arrangement, and soon returned, assuring Moyed-din that the fair Persian entirely acquiesced in the plan.

The wise men of Surat were now approaching in procession through the streets of the city; first came Mhadeo Gúrú, the Brahmin, behind whom followed a page, bearing two ponderous volumes, on one of which was written, in large letters, 'Surya Siddhauta of Varaha Mihira,' and upon the second, 'Padma Calpa of Sri D'hara Padma.' In regular order followed twelve Brahmins, many of whom carried books and papers; some bore the systems of astronomy as laid down in the Brahma Calpa, invented by Brahma Gupta, thirteen thousand years ago; others carried the Varaha Calpa, invented by Varaha Mihira. A vast crowd followed the procession to the palace-gates, and there dispersed, to go in quest of the Mahomedan procession, which was seen slowly approaching from the opposite direction. Supported by two men, came Ibn-al-Agib, pretending his age and infirmities required their assistance; but he felt walking particularly irksome, from a very different cause, which will hereafter be related. Behind him marched fifteen long-bearded sages, counting their beads, and mumbling over the attributes of the Almighty. Ibn-al-Agib was greatly mortified, on his arrival at the palace, to learn the Brahmins had already arrived, as he had

fully intended to have asserted his right of precedence, had they both have met, as was intended, before the palace-gates. How it happened he was not in time will soon be known.

The two sects of astrologers were introduced to the outer hall of the harem, at the upper end of which hung a crimson velvet curtain, embroidered with gold, behind which sat the fair Persian; and at the foot of the curtain stood the writer of the questions, which were put to him from behind the lattice. The Mahomedans were arranged on one side and the Brahmins on the other, and the first question was delivered into the hands of Mhadeo Gúrú, and its counterpart to Ibn-al-Agib; the Nuwab and his Deewan being present. This was a contrivance old Ibn-al-Agib never dreamed of, and he sat twisting the paper which contained the question in utter confusion; and whilst the adherents of the Brahmin crowded around their leader, considering the proper answer, all the Mahomedans sat squatted in a string, waiting old Ibn-al-Agib's pleasure, which seemed to be to do nothing at all, until roused by the voice of the Nuwab, who cried, 'Come, come, most learned Agib, open your paper—set to work.' A circle was at last formed, in the midst of which sat the perplexed Agib. This able astronomer whispered to one of his friends to endeavour, if possible, to overhear what was said by the Brahmins, and this fellow actually succeeded in catching a word, which he fancied was a cue to the result of their decisions. Ibn-al-Agib, justly concluding many other questions would follow, deemed it imprudent to differ from the Brahmins on the very first answer, and, through the means of his friends, was enabled to stumble on the right reply to the interrogation. The answers

being committed to writing, the clerk received them, and read aloud as follows :—

Question 1st.—‘When will the eclipse of the sun take place?’

Answer of the Brahmins.—‘On the fifteenth day of the month of Aswini.’

Answer of the Mahommedans.—‘On the fifteenth day of the month of Aswini.’

‘In truth,’ observed the Nuwab to Moye-ed-din, ‘the astronomers do appear to know something.’

‘They do indeed, my lord,’ replied the Deewan, wondering what the next question would be.

The same ceremony having been gone through, the clerk read once more, as follows :—

Question 2nd.—‘When will the nearest approximation of Venus with the Pleiades take place?’

Answer of the Brahmins.—‘In ten days’ time.’

Answer of the Mahommedans.—‘After two months and twelve days.’

‘Here is a difference!’ exclaimed the Nuwab. ‘I wonder which is right, Moye-ed-din?’

‘I cannot presume to give an opinion, your highness; but I think the answer of the Brahmins is more favourable to yourself.’

‘True, Moye-ed-din, true; they are right, depend upon it.’

The fair Persian having expressed her intention of putting no further questions, the assembly received permission to retire; and as they descended the stairs leading to the great hall of justice, old Ibn-al-Agib strove hard to gain precedence; but the stairs being narrow, and the Gúrí being fat, he found it impossible to

pass him, so that the two sects were all jumbled together, each intending to precede the other on passing through the great gates into the city. Ibn-al-Agib satisfied himself for the present with laughing outright in a contemptuous manner, muttering, 'Ten days, indeed! what ignorance! Pretty astronomers, truly!' The expressions reaching the ears of his followers, they also indulged in the same insulting observations, which, though they failed to affect the dignity of the Gúrú, were so obnoxious to some of his adherents as to compel them to retort; upon which a scuffle, and pulling off turbans, took place upon the stairs. A chobdar in the rear, intending to quell the disturbance, gave one of the party a push, which caused his foot to slip, and, helpless, he fell upon the man before him, who, being a bulky fellow, swept down all in his way; so that all the wise men of the city sustained a mighty fall indeed; and the whole weight of learning was borne by the Gúrú, who had not been fortunate enough to clear the stairs before the whole conclave fell upon him.

Never was there such confusion before within the walls of the palace. At the foot of the stairs lay the fat Gúrú, endeavouring to shake off his old enemy, Ibn-al-Agib, whose coat being torn, and dress disarranged, a shower of silver fell from his waist and person, to his no small mortification. The anxious man was instantly on his hands and knees, labouring to collect his rupees as they rolled to all parts of the hall, and were greedily picked up one by one by the ever-ready peons and servants of the Durbar.

'My money, my money! save my money, I say!' cried Agib. 'Ho, there! you have got some of my rupees; give them up, I say!'

Thus anxious for the recovery of his money, he entirely banished from his mind his determination of precedence ; so that the Brahmin and many of his crew quickly made their exit, leaving the Mahommedans to condole with their distressed leader.

It is now proper the reader should understand, first, how it happened that Ibn-al-Agib was so late in his attendance; and secondly, how he became possessed of so much money as to render its retention about his person a matter of such difficulty. At the appointed time the wary Mahommedan astronomer attended at the Cotwall's house, where he received a second drilling as to the line of conduct he was expected to pursue. The old fellow promised implicit obedience, and held out his hand for the money.

'No, indeed,' said the Cotwall, 'no money before your work is done.'

'I expect my reward immediately,' said Ibn-al-Agib, 'or, rely upon it, I shall proceed in a very different manner.'

'Well, Agib, I did not expect this,' said the Cotwall ; 'but you have no time to dispose of your money, were I to give it you. How can you take so large a sum to the palace?'

'Oh, I have provided against this difficulty,' said the old fellow, drawing from his turban a long narrow bag used by travellers, who, when filled with money, tie it round their waists. 'This,' said he, 'I have made whilst in my retirement ; so let me have the rupees, and lose no time.'

The Cotwall at last prevailed upon Agib to receive half the sum, promising the remainder when the business should be concluded. The anxious Agib speedily crammed the rupees into the

long bag, which he tied round his waist ; but finding them so heavy and inconvenient, he was obliged, as he walked along, to lean on two of his friends for support ; and found himself, owing to the Cotwall's delay in producing the money, considerably behind his time. The affray on the staircase, and the consequent struggle between the two leaders of the astronomer sects, caused the bags around Agib's body to give away, covering the floor with their contents, as has been already related. To add to the mortification of Agib, the Cotwall refused to give him the remainder of his reward, alleging that he had not performed his agreement, having promised to differ from the Brahmin on every point, whereas he understood he had entirely coincided with him respecting the time of the eclipse of the sun. To this nothing could be said, and the old fellow went away highly displeased and dissatisfied.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

THE Nuwab took an early opportunity of visiting the fair Persian, and begged to know when he might expect an answer to his offer of marriage.

‘Your highness,’ replied the lady, ‘condescended to grant my request to be allowed to consult your astrologers and wise men, who are, unfortunately, ignorant on the very point I am desirous of being informed upon. The one party differing so widely from the other, it is impossible I can have any reliance upon either; therefore, as I am positively prohibited from dissenting or assenting, upon receiving an offer of marriage, until after the time when Venus shall have approached the Pleiades, I am under the necessity of naming my own time, at the expiration of which you may rely on my giving you a final answer. An astronomer in Persia, whose learning cannot be called in question, has informed me that the planet Venus will nearest approximate the Pleiades some time in this year. Such an event may have happened during my voyage hither, but on so momentous an affair I am determined to be on the safe side. Suffer this year, therefore, to expire, and my answer shall then be given, provided, during the interim, no male person be suffered to look upon me.

Should such an event occur, I must defer giving my answer for another whole year.'

'By the Prophet!' exclaimed the Nuwab, 'my patience will be exhausted long before the expiration of this year; ay, or even this month; and if you refuse my offers, means may be taken to secure you on cheaper terms.'

'Beware, my lord, how you act. I am in your power, it is true; I am helpless and forlorn; my destiny has cast me on the shores of your protection; reflect, therefore, on the consequences of your rashness. Proceed to violence, and the next moment sees me a corpse at your feet; nor will this alone be the result of your imprudence, for rely upon it your life will become forfeited to the revenge of those who will doubtless learn my fate.'

There was so much earnestness and solemnity in the speech he had just heard, that the Nuwab, for the first time in his life, experienced a sensation of awe no woman had ever before been able to inspire him with. After some time spent in meditation he thus addressed the Persian:

'Pray am I, with the rest of the male creation, to be excluded from your presence?'

'Certainly not, my lord. The sight of a man professing such honourable intentions cannot be improper; nor has any provision been made by the soothsayers at my birth for the exclusion of the man who offers me his hand. The words are, "and during the time between the making the offer and the answer thereto, no other man must on any account set eyes upon" me.'

The Nuwab most cordially cursed the soothsayers and all their nonsense, and left the lady without giving her any positive

assurance of his acquiescing in her extraordinary requests. For many days all around the Nuwab, male and female, experienced the sad effects of his impatience. Moye-ed-din himself dreaded the hour of Durbar, as a schoolboy does the time when he is to appear before his master.

At last the Nuwab determined to vent his rage upon the ignorant astronomers, and actually summoned the whole gang to the Durbar. Now did the Cotwall tremble lest old Ibn-al-Agib should, to exculpate himself, implicate him, and confess the bribery that had been practised. Moye-ed-din was also no less fearful lest the Brahmin should relate the particulars of their clandestine meeting ; for although he doubted not he could convince the Nuwab, if he were in a temper to hear reason, that all his proceedings tended to promote his wishes, yet, furious and dissatisfied as he had become, the very word bribery would have been equal in its effects to the spark of a candle in a magazine of gunpowder. To silence, if possible, the tongue of old Agib, the Cotwall visited the Mahommedan sage, whose surprise on the occasion may be imagined, having both parted mutually dissatisfied with each other.

‘ Brother Agib,’ said the Cotwall, ‘ I have brought you the remainder of the money, which, after due consideration, I conceive you to be entitled to ; oblige me, therefore, by the acceptance of it.’ So saying, he handed forth the bag.

‘ Why, brother Cotwall,’ said the astronomer, ‘ as to the money, I should not have been half so displeased with you had you not paid me a single rupee, if you had but condescended to treat me with respect in the presence of your people.’

‘ Indeed, Agib, I was too hasty, but trust my present visit in person will convince the world of the consequence I attach to your character and profession.’

‘ In some measure it may,’ said Agib, ‘ but I beg to decline any future assistance to you in any of your schemes.’

‘ Truly, friend Agib, I am deeply concerned we cannot agree ; however, rest assured I shall only trouble you to do one thing more for me.’

‘ What is that ? ’

‘ To hold your tongue on the subject of our late meeting and arrangement.’

‘ Of course, for my own sake I shall be silent.’

‘ Ay, silent and secret as the grave ; whoever may question you, swear to suffer torture ere you disclose my name.’

‘ Oh, brother Cotwall, that is another thing ; I have had torture and trouble enough with your affairs already. I can’t answer for the torture ; the bastinado often makes a man betray his secret. No, no, I can’t submit to be tortured ; and if that is what you have brought me the money for, pray take it back again. I would not be bastinadoed for less than a lac of rupees, at least.’

‘ Listen, Agib, I beseech you. All the astronomers are to be summoned before the Nuwab, who is dissatisfied with your answers. Now, rely upon it, he will not be so imprudent as to bastinado the learned Brahmin, and consequently not so unjust as to award to you a punishment which he withholds from him ; therefore——’

‘ I tell you what, brother Cotwall, if there is the remotest chance of my being punished by torture, I shall out with the whole business from first to last, so you had better be prepared. Here,

take your money, and begone. Khooda hafiz !'¹ So saying, he withdrew into the interior of his house, shutting the door violently.

The Cotwall, cursing the crafty old astronomer in his heart, returned home, dejected and alarmed. Moye-ed-din, after considering what was to be done to ensure his safety, once more sent for the Gúrú, and in order the more readily to bring him over to his wishes had prepared a draft of a deed exempting his land from tax, and his cattle from customs. On the entrance, therefore, of the learned Brahmin, Moye-ed-din produced the paper, saying :

‘ Here, Mharaj, I have not been idle, you see ; my word is my bond. Read your grant of exemption, and tell me if you are satisfied.’

The Gúrú eagerly grasped the paper, which having perused, he returned, saying it was perfectly satisfactory, and deficient only in two material things.

‘ Name them,’ said the Deewan.

‘ The seal and signature of the Nuwab.’

‘ Oh, that you may rely upon my obtaining for you, as soon as he is composed enough to attend to business ; but the fact is, you are all summoned to the Durbar to-morrow.’

‘ Indeed !’ said the alarmed Brahmin. ‘ I hope there is no danger. I really am terrified lest I should be examined. My lord, you must protect me.’

‘ Cease these alarms, Gúrú ; be firm, and swear your answers were deduced from your books, and from no other source, and all will be well.’

¹ ‘ God protect you.’

‘ Maybe so, my lord ; but the Nuwab is not always satisfied with oaths ; no, not although I were to swear by the Cow. He has another mode of coming at the truth, the idea of which makes me shudder. Consider the sanctity of my character. I could not survive the pain or the disgrace.’

‘ But I tell you, Brahmin, there is no chance of such means being resorted to ; only he may threaten, though not perform.’

‘ ’Tis a delicate business, my lord ; and although I should be sorry to mention your name, yet I cannot answer what the sight even of the rattan might effect.’

‘ Can you possibly meditate the mention of my name, Brahmin ? Be it so ; but remember your lands can be doubly taxed, as well as relieved from the burthen altogether.’

‘ So must it be then, my lord. I can make no promises, and therefore beseech you grant me permission to depart.’ During this last speech the Brahmin had arisen, and glided by degrees to the door, which he opened, and making a low salaam, disappeared. Moyer-ed-din’s confusion and fears kept him for some time in the middle of the room, undecided how to act ; and in this state of uncertainty we must, for the present, leave him.

The difficulties into which our adversity often involves us not unfrequently renders it sound policy to endeavour to become friends with our enemies, and more especially when their misfortunes are attributable to the same cause as our own. So was it with the characters in question. The Mahomedan and Brahmin astronomers, although they had differed in every celestial discussion, and very seldom agreed in terrestrial matters, now finding they had both been enlisted in a very dangerous affair, naturally felt

anxious to consult with each other on the means of escaping the consequences of their imprudence. Pride, nevertheless, withheld each from making the first advance towards acquaintance, for friends they could never be. The similarity of their present situations and the urgency of the business admitting of no delay, the Brahmin dispatched a letter to the learned Ibn-al-Agib, couched in these words:—

‘The learned Mhadeo Gúrú, Brahmin, astronomer, will be happy in seeing the experienced Ibn-al-Agib at his house this night on urgent business.’

The consequential Agib was some time ere he could screw up his pride to allow him to walk all the way to the Brahmin’s house, and held a long debate with himself whether he should not compel the Brahmin to come to him; but that sovereign remedy for all frivolous scruples of etiquette, the bastinado, compelled him to catch at the remotest chance of avoiding the wrath of the Nuwab, and he therefore dispatched the following answer:—

‘The learned Ibn-al-Agib will be happy in consulting with the well-informed Brahmin at the time appointed.’

At about an hour before midnight, Ibn-al-Agib, muffled up in a coarse grey cloth, sallied forth towards the mansion of his brother astronomer. To his mortification the city gates were shut; he was consequently compelled to deviate from the direct road and pursue a more circuitous one; so that it was past twelve ere he tapped at the Brahmin’s door. The Gúrú received him with politeness, whilst his visitor evinced a haughty demeanour, intending to let the Brahmin understand he must consider his visit

a mighty honour. The Gúrú proceeded to the business at once, saying, 'How are we to avoid the blow that awaits us?'

'Blows, you mean,' said Agib, 'for, from what I could gather from the Cotwall, we shall certainly be bastinadoed.'

'There appears only one way to save ourselves, Agib.'

'To criminate our employers?'

'Certainly.'

'I am ready, Gúrú.'

'I am determined.'

'I will swear by the Prophet.'

'And I by the Cow.'

'Truly we have made a bad business of this, Gúrú.'

'I fancy, Agib, you have made it answer better than I have, if I may judge by the shower of silver which strewed the justice hall.'

'And doubtless you also reaped your reward, Gúrú?'

'In truth, I fear the only reward will be the rattan on the soles of my feet; I have had but promises as yet, which I see no probability of ever being performed.'

'Especially if you criminate the minister.'

'Exactly so; but I may rely on your adhering to your determination?'

'Have not I sworn by the Prophet?'

'You have, and I by the Cow; but let us not be in haste to blab; we may escape by assertions that our answers were deduced from our books, and not purchased by our employers.'

'Oh, yes; I will swear by the Prophet as long as the Nuwab will regard my oath. I will lay my hand on the Koran; but if he

lays his cane on my feet, God protect the Cotwall ! 'I will screen him as long as I can, and I think this will be acting as handsomely as he can expect.'

'Very true, Agib ; wisely observed ; our employers, indeed, expect we are to lay down our lives for their sakes, when they would see us both hanged to answer any of their purposes.'

'Ay, ay, Brahmin, but we shall show them to the contrary ; and I strongly suspect the Cotwall will be bastinadoed instead of me.'

'And the Deewan punished instead of me.'

'But suppose we should all four suffer ?'

'That is not likely, Agib ; the Nuwab's rage will either fall upon the tools or the principals. Now, if we magnify the manner in which we were desired to be subservient to their will, we shall be considered helpless innocents ; for to confess a bribe would lower our consequence, and be no security against punishment.'

'Good thought, Brahmin ! I will swear the Cotwall hung me up by the heels until the agony extorted compliance.'

'And I will swear the Deewan threatened lasting ruin and disgrace to me.'

'Excellent, Brahmin ! this must save us. Let us now separate. God be with you, Brahmin.' So saying, Ibn-al-Agib took his leave, and turning down a narrow lane, after some time reached his own house.

The Deewan and his enemy the Cotwall, being under a greater degree of alarm than the astronomers, conceived it politic for a time to forget their animosities, and meet by appointment at

the palace of the former, where the following polite and half-conciliatory discourse took place, the Deewan commencing:—

‘Brother Cotwall, why should we be enemies? It would be to our mutual advantage to become friends.’

‘I am most anxious, my lord, to embrace the offers of friendship; but how is it possible this can be effected, when you so unwarrantably interfere with the decrees of my court?’

‘If I have done so, it was because such interference might have been avoided by a previous understanding between us, which, had you wished it, might even have taken place after I had reversed your decree against the butcher; and nothing but a determined spirit of revenge could have induced you to go the lengths you did, in forcing the old dyer to complain against me in open Durbar.’

‘Why, my lord, I really don’t comprehend what sort of an understanding could have been made between us. If you mean I should receive one hundred rupees from a petitioner, and decide in his favour, and then give you two hundred not to reverse my decree, mine would not be a very profitable situation.’

‘But the half would content me.’

‘Agreed, if you consent to give me half of your speculations in revenue affairs.’

‘No, no; that will not do either; but we must hit upon some plan at a future time: at present we are met to consider what steps must be taken so as to keep our places, for I fear those cowardly rascals, the astronomers, will betray us.’

‘Surely, Deewan, they would not venture to confess a bribe?’

‘Nor will they: we shall be accused of exercising the most

cruel treatment to compel their obedience to our wishes. But what could have induced you to attempt thwarting my plans?’

‘Did not you mortify me by sending an order, instead of making a personal application to me; and did not you deprive me of the favour I should have reaped from the Nuwab’s hands by producing the fair lady, who was mine by a fair and honest bargain, made ere you had set eyes upon her, or ere you heard of her being in existence?’

‘Surely this was excusable. You were already in power, whilst I was striving to regain my lost honours.’

‘I differ from you there, my lord; a bargain once made should stand good.’

‘Then blame the Arab Captain, not me.’

‘You were the cause; you were the tempter.’

‘Well, say no more; but let us to the point, Cotwall. How can we save our feet from the bastinado, or escape punishment altogether?’

‘By getting the astronomers punished in our stead.’

‘Ay, that is the very thing; but how is that to be done?’

‘Exasperate the Nuwab against them, ere they appear before him; hint that such pretensions to learning should be checked; and, in short, propose the bastinado, as the only remedy for ignorance and insolence.’

‘Excellent plan, Cotwall; I will do as you advise; and the moment the order is out of the Nuwab’s mouth have your policemen ready to seize the fellows, before they have time to say a word; and once out of court, I will provide against their ever coming into it again.’

‘At any rate, they shall not walk to it; for, by the holy Prophet! their feet shall be beaten to a jelly. Let your people be equally on the alert.’

‘Doubt it not, Cotwall.’

‘Then is our business finished. May Heaven preserve you, Deewan!’

‘Angels guard you, Cotwall!’

Thus parted two men who entertained towards each other the most implacable hatred and ill-will; men who had never before agreed on any subject whatever, and now were reduced by necessity, and the similarity of their situations only, to be for once of the same opinion.

The morning came, and the astronomers were dragged before the angry Nuwab, whose ear the Deewan failed not to have previously obtained. At the lower end of the hall stood the Cotwall and his myrmidons, fronting several of the guards of the Durbar, under the orders of the minister.

‘Let the leaders of the rabble, who call themselves astronomers, be brought forth!’ cried the Nuwab; and immediately the Brahmin and the miserable Agib stood before the Musnud. ‘What have you to say in your defence, you miserable blockheads?’ he asked. ‘How can you reconcile the marked difference of your answers to the questions yesterday put to you?’

Ibn-al-Agib, ever striving for precedence, first made answer, saying, ‘Indeed, your highness, the answer I made was deduced from my books, in the study of which I have devoted my whole life.’

‘And this you swear?’

‘I swear by the Prophet!’

‘And I swear by the Prophet you are a consummate block-head not to have made better use of your time; and will teach you to be more learned ere you venture to pursue your trade. Away with him, and let him have one hundred stripes on the soles of his feet.’

The Cotwall’s harpies darted on their victim like tigers on their prey, and bore him away without a chance of his being able to utter a single word. The Nuwab then turned to the Brahmin, whilst Moya-ed-din stood the picture of anxiety and alarm; for neither he nor the Cotwall had calculated on the sentence being passed, first upon one, and then upon the other; he therefore feared the Brahmin, knowing the fate of his fellow-astronomer, would doubtless not hesitate to implicate him. He conjectured right. The Gúrú not only heard the order for punishment pronounced upon poor Agib, but he heard the effect thereof, the screams and agonising yell of the unfortunate man resounding through the hall. When, therefore, the Brahmin was called upon he thus replied :

‘May it please your highness, I was summoned to the palace of your minister, previous to the assembling of the astronomers, and the Deewan in person ordered me to decide as I have done. I at first refused, and begged and prayed not to be expected thus to stain my character and profession; but the Deewan threatened ruin and double taxation, expulsion and starvation, if I refused to act as he should direct. My lord, I dared not do otherwise,’

‘And did my minister dictate to you the answers you gave?’

‘No, my lord.’

‘What, then, were your instructions?’

Moye-ed-din here arose, saying, 'I trust your highness will allow me to explain in private what were my wishes, and rest assured they tended to the advancement of your interest alone.'

'So be it, Moye-ed-din,' said the Nuwab; 'and I hope I shall this time see reason to be satisfied with your conduct. Let the Brahmin, however, first commit to writing the instructions he received from you; and if they tally with your explanation I may be inclined to credit your assertions.'

The Brahmin wrote the very words of the Deewan, and was then desired to depart. Moye-ed-din gave the required explanation, which the Nuwab perceiving agreed with the Brahmin's written paper, expressed himself satisfied, and granted the Deewan permission to retire. At the gates of the palace he was met by the Cotwall, and mutual congratulations passed on their lucky escape.

'Agib,' said the Cotwall, 'has had it soundly, I assure you; and no one ever so richly deserved it.'

'Indeed he was a sad scoundrel,' observed Moye-ed-din; 'and the Brahmin is just as bad, and would have ruined me if he could.'

'What ingratitude!' exclaimed the Cotwall. 'I hope now, my lord, we shall be better friends than heretofore.'

'That depends upon the understanding we may come to, Cotwall; but this is no place to talk on such matters, so adieu; and let us both beware how we again tamper with astronomers.'

These able officers of state here separated, and we must now leave them to the fulfilment of their understanding with each other, and proceed to relate other events of importance.

CHAPTER IX.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

ABOUT three months after the transactions just related, the Deewan was sitting in his dressing-room, awaiting the appearance of Buxoo the barber, somewhat astonished at his want of punctuality, when at last in he came sobbing, and wiping his blood-stained face with the tail of his coat.

‘Why, how now, Buxoo!’ cried the Deewan. ‘What is the matter? You have been fighting, I perceive. Come, let me know the whole history.’

‘Oh! my lord,’ sobbed the barber, ‘never was a civil man so cruelly treated. I must have justice, my lord; and hope for your protection and support.’

‘Well, well, I grant it you, on condition you will be quick in your tale.’

‘Why, my lord, as I was coming past the palace of the Nuwab I perceived a strange-looking fellow, a Persian I think he was, staring and gaping up at the upper apartments of the Zenana. Oh! thought I, this man little knows, were the Captain of the Rajpoot-Guard to see him, what a scrape he would get into; and considering he was a stranger, I went up to him with one of my best bows, saying, “Sir, sir! you must not stand here;” upon which, seizing his sword, he struck me over the face with

the hilt of it, and has, I verily believe, knocked half-a-dozen teeth down my throat ! Well, my lord, when I recovered from the surprise and looked up, the stranger was nowhere to be seen ; so I went home, where I have been this half-hour endeavouring to staunch the blood from the wound the fellow gave me on the side of my head.'

'And have you not again seen him, Buxoo ?'

'I have, my lord ; for in my way hither I espied two men walking very fast, and discovered one to be the savage Persian, and the other to be Mhadeo Gúrú, the Brahmin astronomer.'

'Hah ! indeed, Buxoo, this is strange : we must investigate this business ; in the meantime dress my beard, for the sun is risen, and the Durbar is open.'

The barber did as he was desired, and took his leave, depending on the promises of his master for redress.

The Deewan penetrated deeper into the circumstance of the Persian's appearance before the palace than did poor Buxoo, who had leisure only to think of the blow he had received, and the means of obtaining redress. The appearance of the Persian immediately before the abode which contained his fair country-woman could not fail to create a suspicion of a connection between them. How or in what manner the Brahmin could assist them was a mystery the Deewan could not fathom ; but he entered into a long debate with himself, whether it would not be to his interest to aid the Persian in his attempts, which, doubtless, were the escape of the lady.

'By aiding him I may be discovered ; but there is an equal

chance of not being found out, if I manage things properly ; and if I succeed, shall get rid of a troublesome woman, who has allowed me no peace since her arrival. I procured her for the Nuwab, and it seems am to be answerable for all her whims and caprices. It is clear I shall have no rest as long as she remains. On the other hand, if I thwart the plans of the Persian, I get the thanks of the Nuwab and double locks on the door of the Zenana. Now, the thanks of the Nuwab I do not much value ; but the double locks will entail upon me double anxiety, without a chance of the cause being ever removed.'

After deep consideration on the subject, Moyc-ed-din determined on lending his assistance to the Persian. Having laid his plans, his next step was to procure a meeting with the Persian ; but not daring to trust a servant, determined, when the shades of night enveloped the city, to proceed in disguise to the Brahmin's house. He accordingly provided himself with a Persian black woollen cap, a dagger, and Persian shoes, concluding the man whom he wished to see would the more readily be inclined to converse with a person apparently from his own country than with a native of Hindústan. Not knowing where to find the Brahmin's house, however, he was constrained to defer his visit until the following night, in the expectation of gaining the necessary intelligence from the much-aggrieved Buxoo in the morning.

The barber appeared at the accustomed hour on the following morning, and failed not to urge his request that the Persian might be punished for the unwarrantable assault he had committed on him, the most civil of all men.

'Where is he to be found, Buxoo?' enquired the Deewan.

‘ At the Brahmin’s house, my lord.’

‘ And where does he live?’

‘ A long way off; but not so far, my lord, as to be out of the reach of your power; he lives in an obscure corner, near the river, by the gate leading to the Broach road.’

‘ A small cottage, surrounded by plantain-trees?’

‘ The same, my lord.’

‘ I have often remarked it, when riding that way; but, Buxoo, I fear it will be impossible to punish the Persian.’

‘ Impossible! my lord? Are your subjects to have their teeth forced down their throats for being too civil? Are we to——’

‘ Well, well, Buxoo, I grant that you have been ill-used; but circumstances require you should give up all idea of having the Persian punished; so let me hear no more on the subject.’

Poor Buxoo, who had been boasting to all his friends how his proximity to the Deewan would be the means of his obtaining redress, heard the decided determination of Moya-ed-din with a very grave look of mingled anger and disappointment, and finished his business without saying another word.

The Nuwab daily visited the fair Persian, who now seemed to be more cheerful, and often attended to hear the tales of the other ladies of the Zenana; and actually related one herself. The Nuwab perceived the change with delight, and fancied he was certain of a favourable answer at the end of the year, to the completion of which only two months were now wanting. Every wish of the lady was anticipated by the enamoured Nuwab, whose attentions towards her were redoubled since the blessed change which had taken place. He cursed the astrologers night and day,

saying, 'But for those ignorant blockheads the lady would long ago have been my wife.' Whilst entertaining dreams of future bliss, he little imagined that the man who had furnished him with so much beauty was now actually meditating to wrest her from him; but so it was, for Moye-ed-din's restless spirit, ever planning fresh schemes for his own ease and comfort, foresaw, at the expiration of the year, fresh troubles and vexations.

At the hour of eleven, when darkness covered the earth, the Deewan, dressed as a Persian, descended his private staircase and proceeded by back ways and obscure alleys to the residence of the Brahmin. The night was peculiarly dark and gloomy; a few stars were alone visible in the heavens, and a thick fog was gathering all around. Not a soul did he meet in his way, not a sound did he hear, save the singing of some dancing-girls at a distance, and the beating of their monotonous 'puck-wāz.'¹ He tapped at the Brahmin's door. No answer being given, he repeated the knock; still no notice was taken by the inhabitants of the cottage. At length he ventured to cry out, in an under-tone, 'Mharaj! Ho, Mharaj! Oh, Brahmin! open the door, brother;' and many other such insinuating expressions; but the door still remained shut. At length he made a discovery, which most satisfactorily accounted for the door not being opened from within; namely, that it was fastened without, having a strong chain and padlock at the bottom of it, against which his foot accidentally struck. 'So, then,' thought the Deewan, 'I have had all this trouble for nothing; the house is uninhabited, after all.' Turning to retrace his steps homewards,

¹ A small oval-shaped drum, the invariable accompaniment of the songs of the dancing-girls.

he fancied he saw the figure of a man glide through the plantain-trees by which the house was surrounded ; but as the darkness of the night was such as to warrant doubting his own senses, he was very readily inclined to believe himself mistaken, and continued to walk on at a brisk pace. Passing under a mango-tree, to his confusion and astonishment something fell upon him, which he perceived to be a large fishing-net. He had scarcely time to reflect, ere a number of men started from behind some shrubs, and pulling the ends of the net, made him their prisoner, in spite of all his endeavours to extricate himself. A torrent of abuse was heaped upon him by several rough voices, and he was thrown upon the ground, wallowing in the meshes of the fishing-net. Presently he found himself raised from the earth, and dangling to a branch of the mango-tree, his heels being considerably higher than his head. He was beginning to bellow out, when his face was enveloped in a dirty cloth, which, covering his mouth, effectually prevented his giving vent to his woes. He imagined he was to be left in this predicament the whole night, and that no further violence was intended ; but he was soon undeceived in this idea, by feeling the sharp application of a rattan on his posteriors, which made him writhe in agony, and swing himself to and fro till he was nearly sick. The most abusive expressions followed each stroke of the cane ; and he fancied, nay, was convinced, he recognised one of the voices ; but were he ever so inclined to declare himself, the cloth around his mouth completely prevented his uttering a word.

‘ We will teach you to give yourself airs in this city, my fine fellow,’ said one of the men. ‘ Fetch another cane here ; nay, stay ; bring me that bundle of leathern straps. Ah, these are the

things!’ So saying, they were quickly applied to the thoroughly sore person of poor Moye-ed-din, who could only groan inwardly, and curse his unfortunate stars, which had led him into such a scrape.

The rope by which he was suspended at length broke, or gave way, and down he tumbled on the hard ground with a violence which almost broke his back. The assailants having contented themselves with kicking and pelting him with clods of earth nearly as hard as stones, set up a loud laugh, and left him to his fate. Like the lion in the fable, gladly would the truly wretched Moye-ed-din have availed himself of the teeth of the mouse to extricate him from the folds of the fishing-net; in vain did he attempt to break the meshes or find a hole through which he might creep; at last, after hard and continued struggling, he succeeded in releasing his arms, and recollecting his dagger, contrived to draw it, and soon cut through his prison. Removing the cloth from his mouth, he once more breathed freely the air of heaven. Before he recommenced his journey homewards he wished to rest awhile; but, alas! on attempting to sit down he so sensibly experienced the consequences of his flogging, that he was compelled to abandon all idea of obtaining rest in that position. To add to his embarrassment, one of his high-heeled slippers had somehow or other disappeared, and baffled all his attempts at recovering it; he was therefore compelled to hobble home with only one shoe, suffering, as may be imagined, most severely from the effects of the rattan and leathern straps.

It was considerably past two ere he regained the portal of his private staircase, where all was silent as the grave. Having

reached his apartment, mortified beyond expression, he threw himself upon his couch, hoping by the morning to be free from the torture he was then suffering. It will here be necessary to explain the above extraordinary occurrences, and for this purpose the reader must bear in mind the vexation and disappointment of Buxoo-bhae, the barber, on hearing his master's determination of taking no steps to punish the insolent Persian, who had so ungraciously repaid him for his friendly warning. The chagrin of the barber was so great, that he determined on giving vent to it to the first friend he should chance to stumble upon. Passing by the shop of a leather-cutter, he enquired if his razor-strop was ready, having ordered such an article a few days previous.

'Here it is, Buxoo,' said Sheik Chumra, the leather-seller, 'and I warrant will so sharpen your razors that you could cut the throats of all your customers, one after the other, without turning their edges.'

'Thank you, brother,' said the barber; 'but as I am not so wickedly inclined, I shall never be able to put your assertion to the proof. There is one fellow, however—I wish I had him in my clutches, that's all—I wish I could get him, by Allah!—well, no matter; I suppose I must submit to be knocked down for nothing.'

'Knocked down! brother Buxoo? Who has dared to treat you thus? You, one of our oldest and most respectable inhabitants!' Buxoo related the history of the assault committed by the Persian, and the impossibility of obtaining redress; upon which Sheik Chumra, lifting up his eyes, said, 'Is it possible that a rascally Sheah should thus dare to treat a good and religious Suni? The act cries for vengeance. Brother, we must not let it

pass in silence ; our characters, our religion, demand retaliation ; and if we cannot obtain redress, must take the law into our hands. I will aid you with all my heart. Buxoo, we will teach the fellow to respect the inhabitants of Surat, not to insult them.'

Sheik Chumra was a most zealous and bigoted Suni, and bore a most mortal hatred to all Mahommedans of the opposite persuasion. Buxoo, well aware of this, hesitated not to inform him of the injuries he had sustained ; he was delighted at the warmth with which the leather-cutter espoused his cause, and expressed himself ready to adopt any plan his friend might suggest.

'Where does the villain lodge, Buxoo?'

'Oh, I know where to find him ; he has taken up his abode at the Brahmin astronomer's, in the daytime, but leaves about midnight ; where he then goes I know not.'

'This is fortunate, brother Buxoo ; we will lie in ambush for him, and give him such a drubbing as he perhaps never experienced before, or will again, in the whole course of his life.'

'But how can this be done ? Two of us are not sufficient.'

'Let me alone, Buxoo ; I know of some fellows who will aid us ; my trade often makes me acquainted with the dispositions of my customers, as yours does. See you that fishing-net in yon corner ? It is sent to me for new leathern thongs and straps, and the owners of it will be here presently, and these fellows will undertake to beat the Sheah to a mummy for a few rupees and a bottle of liquor.'

'Will they indeed, Sheik Chumra ? I will pay them handsomely, depend on it. Knocked down, indeed, as if I were a worm—a reptile !—I can't bear to think of it.'

‘Nor I, brother : you shall have revenge, rely upon it. Here come the fishermen ; leave me to settle the business, and remain silent until they are gone.’

Suffice it to say that the fishermen consented to assist in the affair ; and that they did so with success we have already seen, making only a slight mistake, in beating the prime minister instead of the yagabond Persian. This, however, was no affair of theirs ; they pounced upon whoever was pointed out to them by the barber and his friend the leather-man, who, however, to be sure of their prey, remained for some time watching the door of the Brahmin’s house ; and not seeing any one either come in or go out, began to be afraid their plan would miscarry, when, to their joy, they beheld the ill-starred Moye-ed-din knock at the cottage-door. That they might be certain it was indeed their victim, Buxoo sneaked amongst the plaintain-trees, and catching a view of the high black woollen cap, which the unhappy Moye-ed-din had placed upon his head, ran back to his friend, informing him it was the Persian himself, the very man. The path being narrow, they knew their victim must pass under the mango-tree, and Buxoo suggested the plan of securing him in the net, which had been brought with the intention only of rolling up the Persian therein, after he should have been chastised, in the hope of exposing him to the ridicule of the fishermen and passengers on the following morning.

Having, as related, succeeded in catching a man and beaten him, Buxoo handsomely rewarded the fishermen ; and desiring them to disperse, with his friend the leather-cutter, retraced his steps homewards. The barber, as usual, attended at the Deewan’s

palace, where he waited a full hour ere he was summoned, wondering what could be the cause of such unusual delay. The sun being risen, and the Durbar open, he ventured to tap at the door of his master's chamber, but receiving no answer, gently opened it, thinking there could be no harm in just taking a peep. What was his astonishment and dismay at beholding the Deewan fast asleep, and in the middle of the room a Persian's turban! The Deewan, moving in his bed, the alarmed barber shut the door, and silently sneaked down stairs, refusing to give any answers to the questions of the servants concerning their master. Unable to contain his fears, he repaired to his friend the leather-cutter, before whom he stood breathless with fright.

'What now, Buxoo?' enquired Sheik Chumra. 'Has the Persian knocked you down a second time? I should think we had given him employment enough for a day or two, at least, if it is only to cure his sores.'

'By Allah, and the twelve Imaums! Sheik Chumra, we have flogged the Deewan himself.'

'Why, Buxoo, you are deranged!'

'In truth, enough to make me so. Oh, that ever I should have flogged the prime minister!'

'Explain brother, I pray you; and keep me no longer in suspense.'

Buxoo related all he had witnessed, and the Deewan not rising at the usual hour, confirmed him, he said, in the opinion that it was certainly him whom they had so unmercifully chastised. 'And fool that I was!' continued Buxoo, 'I must needs open my mouth to abuse him, whilst you were laying

on your leathern thongs. He must have heard and recognised my voice.'

'Brother Buxoo, this, if it be the case, is indeed a very sad business; but I do hope you may be mistaken. I rather should be inclined to account for the black woollen Persian cap in another way, for probably the Persian has visited the Deewan, and complained to him of the treatment he has undergone.'

'Oh, Shiek Chumra! but the cap? He would not have left that behind him; and you cannot suppose he is sleeping in the same room with the Deewan.'

'Why, truly, brother, I am at a loss to imagine how the case really is; but whether we have beaten the Deewan or the Persian, one thing is necessary to be observed.'

'What?'

'Silence.'

'But the Deewan must have recognised my voice.'

'Rely on it he has too much prudence to open his lips on the subject; if he has been flogged, his dignity will never suffer him to confess it. Go back and dress his beard in curls, and your own countenance in innocence.'

'But should he tax me with the affair?'

'Deny it.'

'It will not avail me.'

'Then confess it.'

'That will ruin me.'

'Then do as you please. All I know is, if we have beaten the minister it is a capital joke, and should be entered in the annals of the time in which we live.'

‘ Ah, brother ! it is all very well for you to jest, whose voice the Deewan never has heard ; but he hears my chattering tongue every day of his life, and cannot he mistaken.’

‘ Well, Buxoo, make the best of a bad business ; I must to my own affairs ; go you to yours, and God preserve you !’

So saying, he quietly began to cut his leather, and spoke not another word.

The distressed Buxoo repaired to the palace, where he learned the Deewan had not yet arisen. ‘ ’Twas him,’ said the barber, talking to himself, ‘ ’twas him, without doubt.’

‘ ’Twas who ?’ enquired the Jemmidar of the Guard.

‘ Oh ! nothing, sir, nothing ! No, it was not him ; it could not be.’

‘ Not who ?’

‘ Why, I thought, sir, I met a man just now whom I remembered to have seen before. ‘ That is all, sir ; but it was not him.’

A messenger now came from the upper apartments, desiring an hircarra to fetch the doctor ; and Buxoo seeing no probability of his services being required, quietly walked home.

The unhappy Moye-cd-din obtained no sleep until it was about the usual hour of awaking ; and so disturbed were his slumbers, that when at a late hour he did awake he found himself restless and feverish, and in no way refreshed from his short night’s rest ; he was sore and stiff in every joint ; his back indeed had received a severe bruise, which confined him to one position, and completely prevented his attempting to quit his bed, for that day at least. The first thing which met his eye was the unlucky cause of all his sufferings, namely, the Persian turban, which, ere he

summoned an attendant, he was particularly anxious to remove. How to reach it, however, was a matter of no small difficulty; and when obtained, what to do with it was equally puzzling to the wretched Deewan. At last he remembered his sword, which stood at the head of his couch, and reaching it, with great pain and many a severe twitch, he brought the fatal cap to the bedside. Fatigued with the exertion, he lay pondering how he should best conceal it; and not being able to arise and place it in his wardrobe, he laid it by his side, covering himself with the coverlid. Somewhat composed, and congratulating himself with the idea no one had seen the woollen cap in the middle of the room, he called to an attendant, and desired he would summon the doctor.

‘And the barber, my lord?’ said the servant. ‘He has been here these two hours.’

‘Curse his impudence!’ muttered the Deewan to himself, whilst in a loud and angry voice he said, ‘The doctor, sirrah, I desired you to send to me.’

The man bowed, and retired to obey his orders.

The city of Surat contained two Hakeems,¹ celebrated, not for their learning, but for their ignorance; and unlike the astronomers, who never agreed upon any one point, they invariably maintained the same opinions, applied the same remedies, and demanded the same fees. Had either of these sages possessed a jot more wit than the other, however, this unanimity would never have existed; their ignorance alone cemented their friendship.

As it was, however, impossible that two stars of equal magni-

¹ Doctors.

tude could shine in the same hemisphere, one of these able physicians considered himself superior, and was allowed to take precedence of the other. The name of this fortunate man was Syud Nahil,¹ and that of his brother doctor Hakeem Jihil.² The former obtained the general assent to his claims of precedence, because he attended in the Moghul Serai, and visited all the rich Mahommedans who resided therein ; whilst the latter practised chiefly in the bazaar and environs. In difficult cases these wise men scrupled not to call in each other's assistance; not that any great benefit accrued from this additional fund of ignorance, but such a step was often resorted to for the satisfaction of the patient, who, as patients often do, would imagine two heads to be better than one; and much oftener was the measure adopted for the sake of putting a fee into each of their pockets.

It happened that, on the morning when medical aid was required by the minister, Hakeem Jihil had occasion to call upon Syud Nahil, at his residence in the Moghul Serai, on professional business, where the following dialogue took place :—

‘Dumagh chak ust?’³ enquired the bazaar doctor, upon entering the apartment of the more fashionable empiric.

‘Indeed I never was better in my life, my worthy friend. What news bring you?’

‘Why, truly Syud, if that a patient is about to die be bad news, then mine is melancholy intelligence indeed, for die he must.’

‘Ah, brother Jihil ! I fear you mean poor Ibn-al-Agib. Have the stars decided against him?’

¹ Stupidity.

² Ignorance.

³ ‘Is your brain sound?’ A Persian mode of salutation.

‘Alas ! he has not been able to apply to them, but has consulted me these three months ; and my answer is far from favourable to him.’

‘But you have not been so unwise as to tell him so?’

‘I think I know my business better, Syud. Would I be so hard-hearted as to tell my patient he must die?’

‘No, brother, nor so foolhardy either; because you know there would then be an end of your fees.’

‘I considered all these things, brother, rely upon it.’

‘Oh ! you are too good, brother Hakeem. But seriously, have you no hopes of his recovery?’

‘None whatever ; yet there may be a chance, if you will lend me your aid.’

‘Name it; I shall be most happy.’

‘Amputation.’

‘Amputation! brother Hakeem? No, no ! that may kill, but cannot cure; and then, when the patient dies, what will the world say?—why truly, that we killed him by sawing off his leg, which otherwise would have got quite well. No, no, brother ! think not of such uncertain means. I positively will have nothing to do with amputation. Let it go on as it is.’

‘It is mortifying by inches.’

‘So let it ; and when he dies the people will not blame us, but the bastinado.’

‘Sound judgment, brother Syud ; that thought never struck me.’

‘To be sure ; ’tis the only way. The original cause of the wound, malady, or distemper must then be blamed, not the

doctors, who are only called in to attempt healing the effects thereof. When your patient dies, therefore, shake your head ; but mind, don't *you* say the bastinado caused his death, or probably I shall have to administer to you on the same occasion. Let the people say or think as they like; and should they be beaten for their imprudence, why the more work for us.'

'Sound judgment, excellent advice, Syud. To be sure, it is the only way. Why, I was called in the other day to cure a woman who was bitten by a cat. You know I always had a horror of a cat, and therefore shuddered on perceiving the effects of that vile animal's bite. I could have probably cured my patient by cutting out the part affected, or by applying caustic; but had I proceeded thus, and the woman died, what would have been the consequence? Why, people would have said I was worse than the cat: so in the present instance you will be considered worse than the rattan.'

'Sound, very sound, brother! You are right, as you always are.'

'I should have been nicknamed and hooted. Indeed, even now the boys, from my horror of cats, call me Billee¹ Hakeem.'

Here the learned doctors were interrupted by the arrival of the Deewan's messenger, who in haste summoned Syud Nahil to the palace.

'God preserve us!' cried the Syud; 'the Deewan sick! I come—tell him I will fly.'

The messenger departed, and old Hakeem Jihil took the

¹ Hindustani for a cat.

opportunity of whispering to his brother doctor not to forget him ; a fee would be very acceptable.

‘ Rely on it I will not forget you, Hakeem ; that is, if circumstances warrant my calling you in. Therefore, remain here, in case you should be wanted.

“ In case,” brother ! I don’t understand you. Why, if the Deewan is sick he *must* have two doctors ; not but what I confess, in reality, one of your skill and ability would be quite sufficient. But for his honour, and our profit, you know?’

‘ Well, well, I will send for you without fail ; but I must be off ; the case admits not of delay.’ So saying, he rushed from the house, running through the streets, hooted by the boys, who shouted after him, as usual, ‘ Billee Hakeem ! ’ The urgency of the business, and the rank of his patient, prevented his noticing the insult ; and proceeding in the rapid style in which he had first set out, he soon reached the palace, and was admitted to the bedside of his patient.

‘ Heaven preserve you, my lord ! Woe is me that I should see this day ! May I enquire the cause of this calamity ? The whole city mourns on the occasion. May Allah grant me a double portion of skill on this melancholy event.’

‘ Come hither, Syud,’ said Moye-ed-din. ‘ I have received a severe bruise.’

‘ Bruise, my lord ! where, where ? ’ So saying he quickly turned down the coverlid, but hastily retreated, exclaiming, with a face of horror, surprising to all around him, ‘ By Allah ! a black cat ! For heaven’s sake, my lord, have it removed ; if it has bitten you I dread to think of the consequences.’

The Deewan could not conceive what could be the meaning of this strange exclamation from the lips of the doctor: he almost began to think a cat had indeed crawled into his bed; and feeling about, discovered the black woollen Persian cap, which, for want of a more convenient place, he had, it will be remembered, tucked under his side. Half-angry with the doctor, and vexed with himself, he cried, 'Psha! doctor; are you mad? There is no cat; and if there was, what harm would it do you?' So saying, he slid the cap under the pillow, and the doctor once more approached. The servants being desired to quit the room, the Deewan recommenced his history of the bruise. The Syud, after hearing once more, begged to be truly informed whether there was not a cat in the bed, looked grave, and said, 'A bruise, my lord, is, of all other things, the most dangerous accident which can befall a man: it often occasions——'

'Don't tell me what it occasions; I know that better than you can tell me. I want you to cure what it occasions—which is pain and misery.'

'With your permission, my lord, I was about to say, that pain and misery were trifles, compared with the consequences incidental to bruises. Pain and misery are only the beginning; but as I see you are unwilling to hear me on the subject, may I ask how the accident happened?'

'No, you may not ask any such impertinent questions; but apply a remedy, without delay.'

'The remedy, my lord, must be proportionate to the disease: for instance, were I to apply the same remedy for a bruise occasioned by a fall down stairs as I would for a bruise occasioned by

a fall from a horse, I should be acting most ignorantly and most unskilfully. The same remedies won't do, my lord. But as yours is a serious case, I must, with your permission, call in my Brother Jihil ere I proceed to examine the part affected.'

'Call who you will, but be quick. Give me your remedy, and not your prattle—that is all I desire.'

'The Syud called to an attendant, and desired him to summon the Hakeem, who would be found at his house, in the Moghul Serai. Seating himself by the bedside of his patient, he spoke not another word until the arrival of his brother ignoramus was announced.

No sooner had Hakeem Jihil entered the room than the Syud addressed him, saying, 'I have summoned you, brother, in a very difficult case, wherein I am averse to act alone: our noble patient has complained of a severe bruise, and I have informed him that the proper remedies cannot be applied until we know how, and in what manner, the accident happened, because, you know, a bruise, though it be a bruise, differs in its appearance and extent of injury done according to the manner in which the said bruise originated. For instance, you, as well as myself, know that a bruise occasioned by a fall from a horse, and one occasioned by a fall down stairs, are two very different things, and require, of course, different remedies. There is likewise, you know, a wide difference between a bruise expected and one unexpected; that is, if a man know he is about to fall, he will naturally expect to be bruised, and prepare himself for it; but this he cannot do when totally unprepared for the accident: as, for instance, his foot slipping from a ladder, a blow from a stick, or (here the Deewan

groaned) a fall from a tree ; for these reasons, therefore, I say we are warranted in demanding the manner in which our noble patient met with his accident.'

'Sound ! brother Syud, very sound ! very excellent judgment ! We must indeed, my lord, know how the bruise originated.'

'Well, then, if you must know,' said the impatient Deewan, 'it was occasioned by a fall from a tree.'

'A fall from a tree !' exclaimed both the doctors.

'Yes, do not I tell you it was a fall from a tree?'

The astonished Hakeem whispered to his no less wondering brother, 'What, in the name of the Prophet ! would the prime minister be doing up a tree?'

'Silence !' said the Syud in a low tone ; and turning towards his patient, said, 'Well, my lord, if anyone else had told me so, I should have much doubted the truth of the assertion, and have been inclined to have observed, "Friend, it is impossible ; prime ministers don't climb trees."'

'Will you attend to my bruise or not?' said the angry Moye-ed-din.

'Certainly !' exclaimed the learned doctors. 'Turn round, my lord. Stay, we will assist you. Gently, brother Hakeem—there, a little more now ; that will do.'

So saying, they bared the Deewan's shoulders to the waist. Moye-ed-din, closely grasping the coverlid over by far the most seriously affected part of his body, considerably below the bruise on his back, determined not to be questioned. The Syud examined the bruise, and shook his head. The Hakeem examined it also, and shook *his* head likewise.

‘When did this accident happen, my lord?’ enquired the Syud.

‘Oh, yesterday evening.’

‘And were you prepared for the bruise?’

‘No! God knows, quite unprepared for anything of the kind.’

‘What could he be doing up a tree in the evening?’ said the Syud in a whisper to the Hakeem.

‘After a cat, perhaps,’ said Jihil, smothering a laugh.

‘By Allah! it must be so; and it was a cat I saw in the bed.’

‘Oh, my lord! how came you to risk your precious life in the pursuit of such reptiles?’

‘I tell you there is no cat in the case,’ said the Deewan. ‘Proceed with your business, and dare not presume to interfere with mine.’

‘My lord, your business is now our business, and *vice versa*. Therefore, if by knowing the particulars of the case we can better be enabled to effect a cure, surely it is natural, as professional, to learn what those particulars may be.’

‘Which you shall never learn from me. So, look ye, dread my anger when I recover, if you speak another word on the subject.’

The two doctors simultaneously thrust their tongues in their cheeks and gave each other a look, as much as to say, ‘We had better not say any more.’ The Syud touched the bruise, and the Hakeem touched the bruise; and both shook their heads.

‘Had you, my lord,’ said the former, ‘sent for us when this sad accident first happened, we might by this time have been able

to pronounce you out of danger, as we should then have proceeded very differently to what we must now do.'

'Sound, very sound !' said the everlastingly assenting Hakeem.

'We must proceed very differently.'

'I wish I had not called you at all,' said Moye-ed-din. 'If you can't do me any good, say so, and begone about your business.'

'Why, my lord, we can do you good, for we shall first apply a fomentation of neem-leaves, then leeches, then a plaster, and then a blister.'

'You mean,' said the Hakeem, 'a blister, then a plaster.'

'Ay, ay ! that is my meaning, of course.'

'What !' cried Moye-ed-din, 'all these torments for a bruise ?'

'Yes, my lord,' replied both the sages ; 'and then——'

'What then ?'

'A few ounces of blood from your arm, hot water, congee-gruel for a week, gentle exercise, and a strong dose of senna every day for a fortnight.'

'But not if the fomentation of neem-leaves has any effect ?' enquired the anxious Deewan, who never had dosed himself in his life.

'Why,' said the Hakeem, who now considered it was his turn to speak, 'it is possible the blister may be dispensed with ; but the senna and congee diet, in my opinion, are indispensable.'

'That is exactly my opinion also,' said the Syud ; 'in that case the plaster will not be requisite.'

‘ True, brother,’ observed the Hakeem ; ‘ no plaster if no blister, the one being to heal the effects of the other.’

‘ But,’ said the anxious Deewan, ‘ if all fail ?’

‘ Then, my lord, we have but one more remedy—but one more expedient—to resort to.’

‘ What is that ?’

‘ Firing !’¹

‘ By Allah ! if you bring your hot irons into this room, you shall both be shorter by the head ; so, my learned doctors, just recollect this. Send for some neem-leaves, and come to see me to-morrow. Be off ! not another word will I hear.’

So saying, he covered himself up with the bedclothes, and the sagacious physicians withdrew.

¹ A common practice amongst the ignorant and unskilful in the medical art.

CHAPTER X.

A SENTENCE COMMUTED.

THE Nuwab, surprised at the non-attendance of the Deewan, sent to enquire the cause ; and understanding he was sick, determined to visit him in person, desiring, however, no parade on the occasion, as he should proceed in the most private manner. Moyed-din, who would gladly have dispensed with the honour, arranged his apartment as well as he could, and desired to be left in quiet, in order that he might obtain some sleep ere the Nuwab made his appearance. So perplexed was he, however, how he should account to the Nuwab for the accident, which had doubtless reached his ears, that little or no sleep visited him, and he saw the hour approach without having hit upon any story likely to be successful in deceiving his master. At last he thought he would say that since his father's death he had made it a practice, once in every year, to visit his tomb, and that in descending the narrow and decayed steps of the vault his foot, owing to the giving way of a stone, slipped, and he was precipitated to the bottom, having received several severe contusions in his fall, which, although he had imagined were not of very great importance, he was informed by the doctors were of a most serious nature. This plausible tale, he imagined, could not fail to satisfy

the Nuwab, and therefore looked upon his approaching visit with less fear than he had before entertained.

The Nuwab made his appearance at the Deewan's palace at the appointed time, and on the stairs met the two learned doctors, who, hearing of the Nuwab's intended visit, determined to let him see how high in repute they were, by the minister's application to them for medical aid. They both bowed to the ground, and the Nuwab, turning to them, said, 'Why, how now, most learned doctors ! what is the matter with the Deewan ? Is he dying ?'

'Hope not, your highness,' said the officious Hakeem; 'only a fall.'

'Oh! a fall, is it?' said the Nuwab.

'Yes, your highness, a fall—fall from a tree.'

'Fall from a tree ! By Mahomet ! my minister is a more active man than I had any idea of. But what could he be doing up a tree ? Well ! this is droll indeed. However, I shall soon hear all about it.' Thus saying, he reached the door of the Deewan's apartment, which being thrown open, he entered exclaiming, 'Why, Moya-ed-din, what in the name of the Prophet have you been doing up the trees ? By Allah, I never knew such a joke in all my life ! Do you want to break your neck, man ; or are you turned bird-catcher ?'

Poor Moya-ed-din, once more thwarted in his plans, could only hang down his head in melancholy silence ; at last he ventured to say, 'My lord, I do not understand you.'

'Not understand me ? Why, I think I speak plain enough. I ask you how you could be so foolish as to climb trees, fall down, and bruise yourself ?'

‘Hah, hah ! excuse my laughing, your highness; but I now do understand you. I conclude you have seen my two learned doctors, and they have given you to understand I owe my misfortune to tree-climbing. It is, however, no such thing ; the fact is, the fellows were so curious to learn how I met with my accident, that I determined to tell them any story but the right one, and thus invented the tree-climbing tale, which I perceive they are fools enough to believe; but to your highness I will rightly relate the true state of the case.’ Here he proceeded with his plausible story of the ruined tomb of his father, which the Nuwab firmly believing, said :

‘Ah ! I thought it was not very likely you should be jumping up trees like a monkey. But I hope nothing serious is likely to happen. Where is the bruise ?’

‘On my back, your highness, and covered over with neem-leaves; and if that won’t do, I am to have leeches, blisters, and plasters, hot water, bleeding, congee, senna, and a hundred other things.’

‘Why, Moye-ed-din, you will become as thin as a rat with all these remedies; we shall not know you again. Your beard made alteration enough. But, by the bye, talking of beards, your barber has presented a curious petition, something about a Persian soldier having beaten or ill-treated him, somehow or other; the man’s wife came with the petition, and so I thought I would let it lie awhile with other papers, until he should himself appear to prosecute the business; but he has never, to my knowledge, presented himself at the Durbar. Do you know anything of the matter ?’

‘I do recollect, your highness, his complaining to me about the assault; but as no one knew where to find the Persian, or anything about him, why, it was impossible to take any steps in the business. Not satisfied with my advice, to wait patiently the reappearance of the Persian, I suppose he thought proper to trouble you on the subject.’

‘I suppose so,’ said the Nuwab; ‘but I should not have paid any attention to the complaint, but for one curious circumstance contained in it, namely, that this Persian was stated to be reconnoitring my palace. This is strange, Moye-ed-din, is it not? What could be his object?’

‘In truth, my lord, I cannot surmise, unless he were admiring its magnificence.’

‘I rather am inclined to think the interior, not the exterior beauties, led him to presume to make his observations. But I have a more extraordinary tale for you to hear.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Ay, indeed; and by which it would seem that the barber has again met with the Persian, and given him so sound a drubbing, that I am hourly expecting a complaint on his part against the barber; his non-appearance, and quietly submitting to be beaten, confirms me it is not his desire to be caught within my walls. Eh, Moye-ed-din, what think you?’

‘Indeed, your highness, I am at a loss to account for his thus quietly putting up with any outrage that may have been committed on him; it certainly looks as if he had no good intentions in prying about your palace. But how has your highness been able to learn that he has really been beaten?’

‘By a singular chain of circumstances. Some fishermen were accused of robbery at a liquor-shop, the owner of which deposed to having seen these men in possession of more money than they could have honestly come by. The fishermen, to exculpate themselves from the charge of robbery, were under the necessity of confessing how they had become so rich; and this confession states that they were hired by the barber and the leather-cutter to waylay a Persian and beat him, which service they performed to the satisfaction of their employers, who rewarded them handsomely. The barber is nowhere to be found to-day, but the leather-cutter we have safe in custody, hoping, by his means, to learn where we can find this Persian, whom I should very much like to see. The leather fellow, however, denies all knowledge of the affair, but the fishermen persevere in their story; and as a proof of the truth of their tale, declared that one of the Persian’s slippers was in the possession of the leather-cutter. Officers were sent to his house, and sure enough they found the slipper, which appears to be quite a new one. Now, as it is more than probable the Persian will set about purchasing a new pair, I have given orders to all the venders of such articles to detain or follow him wherever he goes. But what is this I see? Why, Moye-ed-din! your slippers are the exact counterpart of the Persian’s, red, with spangles, and a star on the toe! Why, I could swear they were the very same; but where is the other? I see but one.’

‘Oh! your highness, it is got under the bed, I suppose; or I dare say I left it at my father’s tomb.’

‘What! and limped home with only one shoe? You must recollect this.’

‘Oh, yes; I do recollect it perfectly; I did indeed hobble home with only one shoe, and my foot is witness to the fact.’ So saying he produced his right foot, which bore the marks of dirt so visibly as to convince the beholder of the truth of his assertion.

‘Well!’ said the Nuwab, ‘this is, indeed, strange! that both you and the Persian should have exactly the same shoes in shape and size, and should both lose one on the very same night.’

‘It is somewhat singular, I confess, your highness, and I am at a loss to account for it: however, I shall enquire about it, if necessary.’

‘And so shall I, Moye-ed-din, rely upon it. There is something very mysterious in the business, which, I think, requires investigation. At present, farewell! A speedy recovery of your health and your lost slipper.’ So saying, the Nuwab took his departure, leaving the unfortunate Deewan to the horrors of his now truly melancholy situation.

The Nuwab, seeing the doctors on the stairs, enquired if in truth the minister was bruised. They answering in the affirmative, the Nuwab departed, satisfied that on this point his Deewan had not deceived him. At one time he determined to dispatch a messenger to the tomb of the Deewan’s father, to ascertain if any slipper was actually there; yet he felt a delicacy in sending a servant to so sacred a place—for the purpose, too, of detecting his minister. He therefore abandoned the idea; and as the doctors had assured him Moye-ed-din was indeed suffering from a bruise, he endeavoured to satisfy himself that the patient had told him nothing but the truth.

Moye-ed-din, fully convinced the Nuwab would send to the tomb of his father to search for the lost slipper, once more racked his brain to find out some plan by which he might not appear to have acted the liar. At this moment his servant, Suliman, tapped at the door, saying the barber Buxoo had arrived, begging most earnestly to be admitted. 'Let him come in,' said Moye-ed-din. 'This fellow,' he muttered to himself, 'may be very serviceable.'

Buxoo, trembling from head to foot, presented himself, and falling on the ground, kissed it three times.

'Well, thou varlet, thou vile knave ! how darest thou appear before me ? A pretty scrape I have got into, truly, owing to your quarrels !'

'Me, my lord ; what ?'

'Oh ! you pretend ignorance, do you ? Do you mean to deny all my sickness is your doing ? Think you I did not recognise your squeaking voice under the mango-tree ?'

'My lord, it is useless to deny what I see you too well know ; but I beseech you to believe me, when I say you were the very last person in the world on whom such indignities, with my knowledge and consent, should have been heaped.'

'You mistook me for the Persian ?'

'I did, my lord : could I imagine *you* would be at the Brahmin's door, in disguise, at such an hour ? I pray you pardon me, my lord.'

'Buxoo, I will forgive you, as I feel convinced you acted entirely under a mistake ; but you see the consequences of taking the law into your own hands—your confederates have

blabbed; your friend, the leather-cutter, is imprisoned; and officers are lying in wait for yourself.'

'Save me, my lord! once more shield me!'

'Faith, Buxoo, I think a touch of the rattan—about half what you gave me—would be productive of the most salutary effects.'

'No, my lord, for Heaven's sake talk not thus!'

'You richly deserve it, Buxoo, for more reasons than one. Pray, how dare you present a petition to the Nuwab, when I desired you to abandon all attempts against the Persian?'

'My lord, this was not my doing; it was the act of my wife, with whom I had left a petition long ere I applied to your lordship. She, not dreaming of any difficulties, and not aware of your desire and commands, proceeded in my absence to the Durbar and presented the petition; for which piece of officiousness I strapped her well, rely on it.'

'On my life, Buxoo, your whole employment seems to be thumping and strapping people, from morning till night! But hark ye; I require your services at present.'

'I am ready, most noble master.'

'Take this slipper and go to my father's tomb, and at the bottom of the stone steps deposit it, and come away. Ask no questions, but be quick in obeying my commands.'

The barber did as he was desired, not without wondering what could be the object of such a measure.

All attempts on the part of the Nuwab to discover the Persian proved futile, and the Nuwab was constrained to bear his disappointment as philosophically as he could, endeavouring to persuade himself that if the fellow had any designs against him,

he had departed convinced of the impracticability of putting them into execution. Time rolled on, and the eventful year wanted but twenty days ere it closed on the world for ever. The fair Persian became more animated than ever, and the Nuwab consequently more enamoured and delighted. Everything seemed to proceed as favourably as he could wish; and, whilst this harmony is existing at the palace, let us turn to the Deewan and the astronomers, the former entirely recovered from his bruises, without the aid of either blister, plaster, or senna, and once more attending at Durbar. Not so fortunate was poor Agib, the Mahomedan astronomer, for, as the Hakeem had foretold, his foot, from the effects of the bastinado, mortified, and he died the victim of injustice and diabolical malice. The Brahmin, Mhadeo Gúrú, fully aware his small estate, from the expected double taxation, would yield him no profit, shut up his house and departed to Broach, hoping there to find a purchaser, as he intended to dispose of it and quit Surat for ever. He had actually departed, on the very day Moya-ed-din unfortunately assumed the dress of the Persian and attempted an entrance into the cottage.

The Nuwab, anticipating a favourable answer from the fair Persian lady on the termination of the year, had actually commenced giving directions for the preparation of the wedding, which he determined should be conducted in the most splendid style. He had issued his orders to assemble the Dervises and Fakeers, to whom food was to be supplied for ten days. The city was to be illuminated, and all prisoners and captives liberated. The most celebrated singers and dancing-girls were ordered to be collected

from Cambay, Broach, and Ahmedabad, and many other places. Fireworks were already in preparation, and the city was beginning to be crowded with visitors from the neighbouring cities ; whilst the streets swarmed with jugglers, rope-dancers, bears, monkeys, and beggars. A circumstance, however, occurred which put an end to all the Nuwab's dreams of happiness. Mheitab, the fair lady for whom all this vast preparation was making, expressed a desire to visit the Mahmud-a-baugh palace and enjoy the salubrious air of its magnificent gardens. Her request was immediately granted by the indulgent Nuwab, who, to prevent the possibility of her being seen by any male person, issued an order that on the occasion of the visit to the Mahmud-a-baugh palace every house in the city should be shut up, and not an inhabitant be seen in the streets under pain of death. All, accordingly, was as quiet as the grave, and the lady reached the palace in safety. After having enjoyed the fragrant air of the gardens, she desired that her palanquin might be stationed at a private door at the end of a shady avenue, requesting that the guards and attendants might await her coming in the main road. The captain of the guard, however, respectfully represented the necessity he was under of ordering two of his men at least to accompany the palanquin wherever it went, and the lady was obliged to assent.

The shades of evening drawing near, Mheitab opened the portal close to which the palanquin was stationed, the bearers and guards standing at a respectful distance until she was seated. All being ready, the two guards slowly moved onwards, and the bearers raised their lovely burthen ; when, to the amazement of of them all, a number of men rushed from behind an angle of the

garden-wall, and rudely opening the doors of the palanquin, gazed full upon the fair lady, and then instantly took to their heels and disappeared in a moment. In vain the two guards pursued them—not a trace was to be seen. The piteous shrieks of Mheitab having reached the ears of the guards who awaited her approach on the main road, they rushed towards the spot, and having heard of the outrage, hung down their heads and beat their breasts, saying, ‘Our last day is come, we shall surely die!’ The captain of the guard gave orders to some of his men to pursue the audacious fugitives, whilst the remainder escorted the lady back to the city. Upon her arrival at the palace, the Nuwab, his countenance dressed in smiles, appeared ready to receive her; but what was his dismay at perceiving her wonted placid and bewitchingly beautiful face clouded over with frowns, whilst fierce indignation beamed from her eyes, and her whole frame was dreadfully agitated.

‘Heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘what has happened?’

‘Enough has happened, my lord,’ replied the irritated fair one. ‘I have been insulted by the rabble of your city; rudely have my palanquin-doors been burst open, and a dozen men at least gazed upon me. Is this what I am to expect by wedding you? Have you so little authority in the city? Are your orders ridiculed, and your decrees set at nought? By the Prophet! I would rather wed a foot-soldier than a prince without power. My answer must now be deferred another year. Allow me to retire.’

So saying, she left the enraged Nuwab to give vent to his anger on whomsoever he listed.

Jelal-ed-deen rushed through his palace like a roaring bull or

a famished lion bellowing for food ; he wished to give orders, but his attendants hid themselves from his view, and he found it necessary to be more calm, in order that he might induce some one to come near him. At last a servant peeped from behind a curtain, and the foot of another was heard upon the staircase, and by degrees the palace appeared as if it was inhabited. The Nuwab sent for Moye-ed-din and the general of his troops, the valiant Sulah-ed-din Shumseer Behauder. The latter appearing first, the Nuwab cried :

‘ Sulah-ed-din, send a band of soldiers and bring the Cotwall in chains before me ; secure the captain of the guard, and see that the gates of the city are locked, and egress allowed to no one. Order also two executioners to be in attendance, and see their axes are well sharpened. Away ! ’

The general bowed, and departed to give the necessary orders. At the gate he met the terrified Deewan, who had already heard a confused report of all that had occurred, and had hurried to the palace ere the messenger in quest of him had seen him.

‘ General, what is the matter ? In what a state of confusion is the palace ! Who is to suffer ? ’

‘ By Heaven, Moye-ed-din, I believe every one of us ! The Cotwall is sent for in chains, the captain of the guard is imprisoned, and executioners are ordered to be in readiness. So, Moye-ed-din, look to your head.’

‘ Alas ! ’ cried Moye-ed-din, ‘ I am always blamed ; and now God grant me strength to stand before the enraged Nuwab.’

So saying, he slowly approached the audience-hall, cursing in his heart the Persian lady, who, he had predicted, would give

much trouble ere the year expired. The Nuwab was sitting on his musnud, in all the horrors of enraged despotism; his eyeballs rolled in his head, casting a furious gleam of vengeful anger, amounting to madness, on all around him; one hand held a drawn sword, whilst the other was firmly clenched, and his whole frame appeared paralysed with unquenchable fury. Before this worse than maniac the humble Deewan prostrated himself, saying, 'Peace be unto the mighty!'

'Peace! thou audacious slave! Does this scene look like peace? My orders are disregarded, my will set at nought: you all conspire against me. But, by Allah! you shall all soon see what I can and will do when roused to vengeance. Send hither forty expert writers immediately.'

Moye-ed-din, glad of an opportunity to get away, retired to obey his orders, and the writers soon made their appearance.

The Cotwall, encircled with heavy chains, next appeared. 'Forward with that most insolent man,' cried the Nuwab, The poor trembler having advanced, the Nuwab thus addressed him 'Did not I give orders, most positive orders, for the police to see that not a human being left his house this evening? How have you, the head of the police, obeyed those orders? A dozen or more villains were at large, notwithstanding the proclamation. Ay, be silent; that is, indeed, advisable,' continued the Nuwab, who, nevertheless, most anxiously hoped the Cotwall would make a reply, that he might have an opportunity of saying his insolence added to his crime. Finding the poor wretch before him still remain silent, he proceeded, saying, 'Well! not a word to say for ourself? Was there ever such a guilty man!'

‘My lord!’ said the Cotwall, finding his humility likely to avail him but little.

‘Don’t speak to me, on pain of instant death!’ roared out the Nuwab; ‘indeed, were I not the most mild and patient of men, you and your head would have parted company long ago. You will remain a prisoner for the present. Where are the writers?’

All bowed, saying, ‘Hazir Khoodawund.’¹

‘Moye-ed-din,’ said the Nuwab, ‘see that these men go immediately round the city and write down the names of every male person in it above the age of eighteen; and mark me, I swear by the Koran if I should discover at any future time any man’s name omitted, every one of the writers shall suffer death! The gates are shut, so that egress is impossible. Let every man’s name at present absent on any journey be omitted.’

Having given these orders, the Nuwab retired for the night. All wondered what would be the end of this extraordinary proceeding, whilst the writers commenced their work under the superintendence of Moye-ed-din, who was obliged to be up all night, and busy the whole of the following day, watching first one writer and then another, and appointing officers to protect them on their duty, as well as to be a check upon themselves. Any inhabitant who begged his name might not be written down, or who refused to give his name and age, was instantly flogged; so that, by these rigorous means, every name was at last obtained, with their ages and places of abode. When fairly copied into one large roll of paper, the Deewan, on his knee, presented it to the Nuwab, who said, ‘As I cannot find out the guilty crew who

¹ ‘Present, my lord.’

dared to despise my orders, I am determined to let my vengeance fall on one man out of every thousand the city contains. Moye-ed-din, mark off the list accordingly, and make a separate list of those devoted to atone for the insult I have received ; and let them be quickly apprehended.'

The whole city was in the utmost consternation, no one knowing who would be the sufferers. At last one hundred names were given up, and they were quickly seized and imprisoned.

The fair Persian shuddered at the bloodshed she should occasion, and endeavoured, by remonstrance and prayer, to avert the wrath of the Nuwab, but he would give no answer to her entreaties. In the meantime the Deewan's palace was beset by the most respectable and wealthy Mahommedans, who begged him to remonstrate with the Nuwab on this unheard-of piece of cruelty, in punishing so many innocent men ; and concluded by observing there was a higher power on earth than Jelal-ed-deen, and that he had better be cautious.

Moye-ed-din with concern perceived the strong feeling of discontent which prevailed among all classes of the inhabitants, and undertook to present a petition from them, which he promised to back with all the eloquence he was master of, to endeavour to ensure success. The petition being drawn up and signed by a vast number of wealthy men, both Mahommedan and Hindoo, poor Moye-ed-din proceeded on his delicate and dangerous undertaking, bitterly repenting his having himself been the cause of all the present calamity.

Moye-ed-din, in thus undertaking to rescue the unhappy prisoners, did so more out of regard for himself than for them, for

he felt convinced the wrath of the people would fall upon him were they sacrificed. Fearing, lest in avoiding one danger he was running into another, he arrived at the palace of the Nuwab, of whom he requested an audience, which being granted, he approached the presence ; and holding in one hand the petition of the inhabitants, thus commenced :

‘ May it please your highness, I should not be doing my duty as your minister were I to witness the commission of an error on your part in silence. I entreat your highness, therefore, to listen to my humble advice, and what I have to urge on the present occasion. Your orders have, perhaps, not been strictly adhered to ; but consider, my lord, the outrage committed took place, not in the city, but near the palace-garden of the Mahmud-a-baugh. The police therefore, as far as their jurisdiction extended, most scrupulously attended to your commands, and the willing and ever obedient populace confined themselves to their houses, and for a time put a stop to their ordinary occupations. Is it just, is it wise, to punish impudent vagrants who probably do not nor ever did belong to the city? My lord, I protest against the measure. Remember, I, as well as yourself, will be held responsible for the act to the higher authority of Delhi ; and rest assured the surviving relatives of the miserable persons at present under sentence of death will not sleep over their injuries. You well know the character of the Emperor Mahommed ; run not, therefore, I beseech you, this risk of incurring his displeasure, and what is of far more consideration, the wrath of Heaven, and all for the sake of a woman. Let your enemies have no such hold upon you ; let not your character go forth stained with the blood of the

innocent. Suffer me to have the pleasure of being the bearer of your orders for the release of the unhappy prisoners; and far more grateful will it be to your ears to hear the cries of their blessings than the groans of their curses upon the author of their woes. Here, my lord, is a petition, signed by all the most wealthy and respectable of the inhabitants; despise not their prayer, I beseech you, for your own sake. I have done, my lord, and my thanks are due for so patient a hearing.'

The Nuwab, convinced in his own mind that all his minister had been saying was very true, received the petition and waved his hand for Moye-ed-din to retire. When alone he ruminated on the speech of his minister, then read the petition, which was couched in the most respectful terms. 'I must not kill the fellows,' said he to himself; 'Moye-ed-din is right; but then the people will think I spare them through fear. This idea hurts my pride, and prompts me to adhere to my first determination. I will wait a day or two at least, so that if I do release the prisoners my mercy shall not be attributed to Moye-ed-din's intercession. No, I had rather have it understood the petition effected its purpose. By these means I shall flatter the noble and wealthy Mahommedans, and not lower my own consequence.' With this determination he visited the fair Persian, and thus addressed her:

'Most beauteous of women! I have pondered on your sweet words, and am inclined to listen to your prayers and intercession for the prisoners now under sentence of death; but I am determined some one shall suffer for the insult committed. If, there-

fore, I pardon the prisoners, may I expect an early answer from your beauteous lips?’

‘My lord,’ replied the lady, ‘I have it not in my power to name an earlier day than the end of the ensuing year ; but in order that we may not, during that interval, or great part of it, be at a loss for amusement, I have a plan I am anxious to propose, which I trust will meet your approbation.’

‘Name it.’

‘Your ladies have exhausted their stock of amusing tales ; their songs no longer possess the charm of novelty, and your present disappointment demands some entertainment, to divert your thoughts from the recollection of it. I propose, therefore, that you cause the heads of every principal trade and profession to appear in regular succession in your *anderun*, and demand from each of them the relation of some entertaining story ; and when all shall be concluded, punish him who has told the least amusing one ; that is, if you are indeed determined some one shall suffer. You will find by this plan a fund of entertainment for your leisure hours. Your subjects having offended you, cannot but see the justice of now being called upon to please you, which, when they know your determination, they will not fail striving to do with all their power.’

‘Fair lady,’ replied the Nuwab, ‘although all the tales that ever were invented can never compensate me for the suspense you keep me in, yet, for your diversion as well as my own, I give my assent to your plan, and will proceed to issue my orders accordingly.’ So saying he withdrew, and retired for the night.

On the following morning the Durbar was unusually crowded, as it was expected the result of the petition would be made known. The Nuwab, after musing for some time, ordered all the prisoners to be brought before him. The unhappy fellows, not knowing what was to be their fate, came trembling into the hall, all bowing three times to the ground. 'Prisoners,' cried the Nuwab, 'I release you all, upon one condition. I have been offended, deeply offended, by some ill-disposed persons, and now the least you can all do is to endeavour to please me as far as you can. I have determined, therefore, in your stead, to summon the heads of every trade and profession in the city, from whom, each and severally, I demand an entertaining tale or narrative, which I propose listening to in my leisure hours. Remember, though I now release you, should I be again disappointed, and the heads of your professions demur on the plea of inability to afford me the amusement I require, I have your names in my black list, and my original determination shall be carried into execution, and you shall be answerable for their neglect or disobedience. It becomes every man's interest, therefore, to provide those with stories who do not themselves happen to be acquainted with any. To my Deewan I leave the arrangement of the plan; but I must demand security from the heads of professions that they will be ready to appear with their stories at the time which may be appointed for them, which I have determined shall be this day month. And remember, he that tells the least amusing tale must suffer punishment, and on this I am determined. Moye-ed-din, release the prisoners, and take the required security from the heads of the professions in the city. I exempt from the task of relating stories

my Deewan, my secretary and revenue collector, and my treasurer and general of my forces, intending that they, with myself, should determine, at the conclusion of the tales, which has the least amused us. I expect a report of progress to-morrow. Moyer-ed-din, look to my orders.' Having thus concluded, the Nuwab arose, amidst the cries and rejoicings of the liberated prisoners and their anxious relatives.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HEADS OF THE PROFESSIONS.

MOYE-ED-DIN did not fail to give out that it was entirely owing to his intercession the prisoners were set at liberty; and consequently, as he passed through the streets on his way home, whole crowds of persons threw themselves prostrate on the ground before him, calling him their father and preserver. The highly-flattered minister leaned from his palanquin, first on one side and then on the other, bowing and smiling to all around him. On arriving at his palace the anxious Buxoo appeared, his face dressed in smiles, and his person perfumed with the sweet-smelling mogree, as if it were a holiday. Buxoo had heard of the general pardon, which he had believed was unconditional, and therefore conceived this was indeed a day of rejoicing. Moyer-ed-din did not undeceive him, being determined to play him a trick, which was, he thought, but fair, considering the many the fellow had played him. Calling him into his apartment, therefore, he said, 'Well, Buxoo, this is a joyous day, is it not ?

'Thanks to your lordship's wisdom, it is indeed !'

'I hope, Buxoo, it is generally considered so, and that the heads of every profession will cause the rest fully to understand how my intercession has saved the innocent. Who is the head of your trade, pray ? I desire you will report to me if he has

summoned your understrappers, for the purpose of making the necessary explanation.'

'My lord,' replied Buxoo, 'you are pleased to be facetious. Understrappers, indeed! And who is the head of my trade? Surely, my lord, your own barber must be considered the king of strappers.'

'Ay, Buxoo, I dare say your wife thought so, when you chastised her for presenting the petition.'

'No. But seriously, my lord, I am the acknowledged head of the trade; no one ever entertained an idea of calling my right in question.'

'Oh, very well, Buxoo, I am glad to hear it. Ho, there! who waits?'

A servant appearing, he desired his secretary to be summoned, who quickly attending, the Deewan said, 'Syud Nuwese, you have heard the Nuwab's orders, that the heads of every class are to appear on this day month, with entertaining stories in their mouths; dispatch, therefore, your deputies and assistants to take down the names of the heads of the principal professions; and, d'y'e hear, fail not to place Buxoo's at the head of the barbers.'

Poor Buxoo, had he been aware of the consequences of his pride, would rather have sunk the lowest of the low in the list of shavers than have thus exalted himself. Moye-ed-din laughed most heartily at the visible embarrassment of the barber, and, patting him on the back, said, 'Fear not, Buxoo; so entertaining a fellow as thou art cannot fail of producing something highly amusing to the Nuwab. You have a month to consider of your task; make good use of your time.'

‘Indeed, my lord, I never told a story in my life.’

‘Oh, don’t say so, Buxoo.’

‘I mean a tale, my lord. I shall begin at the wrong end of the only one my father used to relate to me, my confusion and terror will be so great.’

‘Never fear, thou prince of strappers; there will be others in the same situation; and if you cannot recollect a good story, perhaps, with the aid of your strap, your wife may be able to assist you in framing one.’

‘But, my lord, there is old Suliman Dáree, the bazaar barber, a much older man than myself—and we ought all to respect years—I do not know but what he will expect to rank before me.’

‘Surely not, Buxoo; no one, you know, ever entertained an idea of calling your right in question; and I don’t think the present is a likely time for him to urge seniority as a plea for precedence.’

‘But, my lord, if my tale is not amusing?’

‘That is your affair, Buxoo; only take care there shall be some person’s less so than yours, or, by Allah! you will lose your head.’

‘Lose my head, my lord! Was ever man so situated? On my life, I know not how to keep it on my shoulders!’

‘Tell the best story you can, Buxoo, and perhaps I will speak a good word for you; but if it be very bad indeed, there can be no help for you; so depart.’

The joyful countenance of Buxoo was now turned to woe-begone melancholy. Astonished at the change, the servants and

guards crowded around him to learn the cause. 'Oh, my friends,' said he, 'after this month, probably, I shall dress your beards no more.'

'Why, Buxoo, why? What mean you?'

'Oh, I am selected for a tale-teller.'

'Why, man, that has been your employment ever since you handled a razor: surely this cannot alarm you? But there must be some mistake, or the Deewan is joking with you. Old Suliman Dáree is the head of your profession.'

'Oh, no, he is not, said Buxoo,' shaking his head; 'he can't be now, at any rate: I have fixed my own doom by asserting my claim to precedence ere I knew of this story-telling arrangement. I am already down at the head of the list; it is all over with me, unhappy man that I am!' The servants and guards set up a loud laugh, the noise of which fell on the disturbed ears of poor Buxoo till he had cleared the street in which stood the Deewan's palace.

On his arrival at his own house he was met by his wife, who appeared adorned with smiles, ready to communicate some pleasant news; but, seeing her husband so dejected, she wisely held her tongue as long as she could. At last, hoping her intelligence would chase away sad care from her husband's brow, she began, saying, 'Praise to Allah! you are out of the scrape, unless old Suliman should die before his turn comes to relate a story.'

'Alas! I am already down in the list,' said the desponding Buxoo.

'No, indeed you are not,' replied his wife, 'for I saw the secretary come past this way; so, for fear he should suppose you

to be the head of the barbers, I popped out my head, saying, "May it please you, sir, Suliman Dáree is the head shaver; shall I show you where he lives?"'

"Ay, ay, good woman," said he, "I know all about it; don't trouble yourself." Saying which, to my great joy he passed on to the street where the tailors live, and never came near our house. So pray, Buxoo, look cheerful.'

'My head! my head!' said the poor fellow.

'What! are you sick? Do let me go for Hakeem Jihil.'

'Oh, no, he can do no good; it is off, my head is off!'

'Off! no, indeed, it is quite fast on,' replied his wife, giving it at the same time a good shake.

'Away!' cried the angry Buxoo; 'it is not fast, I tell you.'

The poor woman fancied her husband was certainly deranged, and sat silent in great perturbation, until he at last condescended to speak intelligibly, and duly informed her into what a scrape his pride had involved him; upon hearing which she began to be nearly of the same opinion as her husband regarding the infirm state of his head; and at last both determined to make the best use of their heads whilst they had them, and toil incessantly, until, between them, they could cook up a story sufficiently entertaining to banish all fears on the subject.

The secretaries, having completed their tasks, returned to the Deewan, who, pleased with their expedition, ordered the town crier to parade the city, to summon the heads of the professions to his palace on the following day, where he would give them the necessary instructions. Accordingly, on the next day, the Deewan beheld assembled the following persons, namely:—

1. Noor Mahommed Cotwall, Mahommedan.
2. Rajeram Kevulram, Captain of the Guard, Hindu.
3. Laldass Munchordass, Chief Merchant, Hindu.
4. Buxoo-bhae, Head of the Barbers, Mahommedan.
5. Sooe Bin Tanchnee, Head of the Tailors, Mahommedan.
6. Sheik Rotee-bhae, Head of the Bakers, Mahommedan.
7. Syud Maloom, Schoolmaster, Mahommedan.
8. Kuzl-bashee, Dyer, Mahommedan.
9. Tambadass, Coppersmith, Hindu.
10. Katil-bhae, Butcher, Mahommedan.

The names contained above being called over, and all being present, the Decwan explained to them the orders of the Nuwab, and that a month was allowed to them for their preparation; and that there might be no contention amongst them which might not be first to relate a tale, he desired all to attend at his palace two days before the expiration of the month, in order that they might, in his presence, cast lots to decide the point. Wishing them success, he proceeded to demand the required security, agreeable to his instructions. Being all of respectable families, bail was instantly procured, and they were allowed to depart; the Deewan having previously impressed on their recollections the heavy penalty awaiting him who should tell the least interesting story.

During the month nothing of importance occurred. The fair Persian was as affable as ever, whilst the rest of the establishment of the Zenana anxiously looked forward to the time when the stories would commence, there being a sad dearth of amusement within the walls of the Harem. The consternation of those who were to afford this amusement to the fair inhabitants of the Zenana may be better conceived than expressed. In vain they strove to recollect old tales related to them by their fathers, and

equally futile were their attempts to procure any from their friends and neighbours. Some would have applied to the schoolmaster for aid, but recollected that he himself, most unfortunately, was one of the party, and would of course reserve all his knowledge for his own use. Some applied to their wives for aid; but these unfortunate persons, having from their infancy been bred up in ignorance, answered the applications with a look of amazement, strongly blended with stupidity; spread their hands—an action truly indicative of entire helplessness—crying ‘How should I know any story?’ Others, willing to do all they could, began some childish tale, to which the anxious husband patiently attended, in the hope that some idea might spring up, on whose basis a story fitting for the Harem might be fabricated; but, alas! neither head nor tail was to be made of stories where peacocks were heroes and doves heroines.

The schoolmaster was fully as much perplexed as those who would have applied to him. Broach was the extent of his travels, and his literary knowledge went no farther than the *Gulistan*¹ and the *Anvary Soheily*,² the stories in each of which were as well-known to the Nuwab as to himself.

The perplexed teacher called to mind an old chest full of manuscripts which had been his father’s; this he removed from its quiet corner, and quickly examined its contents. Several portions of the Koran first presented themselves; then a complete manuscript of the *Siffut-al-Ashukeen*, a treatise on love; next came the *Kullelah*, *Waw Dumnah*, or, the Fox and the Jackal, being nothing more nor less than an abbreviation of the *Anvary Soheily*. At last

¹ Book called the ‘Bed of Roses.’

² The lights of the star Canopus.

he stumbled upon something which he imagined would doubtless assist him ; it was a book called the Huka-yut-i-Hindee, or Indian Tales ; but, after attentively examining them, he found they were too short and simple, all concluding with some moral lesson, which, perhaps, might not be acceptable to the Nuwab. Next came a beautifully written copy of the Tooti Namch, or the Tales of a Parrot—a book too well known for him to borrow from ; then the Aklaki Muhussune, or an Essay on Good Manners ; and last of all a tale called Kúrbah Waw Kubooter, or the Cat and the Pigeon, which never having heard of before, he concluded it was written and invented by his father, whom he heartily wished was now alive to render him assistance. Neither of the two last-mentioned works affording him any help, he hastily re-deposited the manuscripts in the chest, which he once more consigned to its former station.

Almost the whole of the party being in the same predicament as the schoolmaster, they determined to present a petition to the Nuwab, representing their inability ; but the whole city, especially the one hundred prisoners who had been released, but whose lives depended upon the obedience of the party appointed to amuse the Nuwab, were up in arms against them, threatening vengeance if they attempted a remonstrance or presented any petition whatever. Thus deprived of their only hope, they were under the necessity of making use of their own invention, and, in anxious uncertainty, awaited the termination of the month.

Kuzl-basheo, the dyer, hearing that a singular old woman resided in an obscure part of the city, kept his knowledge a profound secret, determining to visit her at midnight, being informed she

was in possession of several amusing histories of former times, and particularly in the reign of the Emperor Acbar. At eleven at night the sagacious dyer, enveloped in a dark blue cloth, proceeded to the lonely dwelling of the Sibyl, and there to his mortification beheld his old enemy the butcher in the act of egress. His hopes of success were now damped; but he thought he would, nevertheless, attempt to gain admittance, and accordingly tapped at the door; but the old beldame paid not the slightest attention to him, although he bawled through the door his offers of immense reward would she but admit him. Returning home, his wife, perceiving how disconsolate he was, enquired the reason, which having heard, she solved the mystery by informing her husband that the old woman was the grandmother of the butcher's wife; and that as Katil-bhae was one of the story-tellers, she of course would not assist any other person. Poor Kuzl-bashee not knowing what to do, or how to gain assistance, neglecting his business, sat melancholy at the door of his shop, where a Fakeer one day addressed him and begged for alms. The idea struck the dyer that this man, from his wandering habits, must certainly have learnt something worthy to be related to the Nuwab; he therefore sounded him on the subject, and the answers of the mendicant giving him great hopes, he invited him into his house, and entertained him.

Having eaten a plentiful meal of rice, the mendicant, calling for tobacco, smoked away quite at his ease. 'My friend,' said he at last, 'what style of story do you wish for?—love tales, or battles,

'Oh, anything,' said the delighted dyer; 'whatever you happen to have uppermost.'

‘Very well,’ replied the Fakeer; ‘I am fatigued at present, and need repose, but will on my pallet call to my recollection a tale which I think will suit you, and will relate it to you in the morning.’

‘Thanks, a thousand thanks,’ said the dyer; ‘I will reward you most liberally.’

The Fakeer, having finished his hookah, retired to his bed prepared for him by the attentive Kuzl-bashee, who, certain of being in possession of a story in the morning fit for the ears of a Nuwab, retired well-satisfied to rest.

In the morning, however, upon searching for the holy man, he was nowhere to be found; nor was his loss alone to be deplored, but many of his cloths, two brass pans, and a copper pot had also disappeared. The unhappy Kuzl-bashee beat his breast and bewailed his loss so loud, that his neighbours crowded around him; and, being informed of his misfortune, gave information to the Cotwall, who dispatched persons in all directions to apprehend the Fakeer; but all to no purpose—he was nowhere to be found.

The day on which all the party were to attend at the Deewan’s palace, for the purpose of casting lots who was to relate the first story, at last arrived; and Moye-ed-din, having placed several folded papers in a cap, desired each to draw one, and that marked No. 1 was to decide the point. The lot fell on the Cotwall, who was desired to be in readiness to relate a story, before the Nuwab in person, on the first of the ensuing month. The Cotwall would not willingly have been the first to begin the series of tales; but, helpless, he made a sort of bow to Moye-ed-

din, and without saying a word stalked away, followed by the remainder of the disconsolate band.

The half of the Zenana was divided by a large crimson curtain, behind which was the seat of the fair Persian lady and the rest of the ladies of the Harem. Immediately in front of the curtain was erected a throne for the Nuwab, on each side of which were carpets, with pillows for the accommodation of the minister, the general, the treasurer, the secretary, and other important officers exempt from the task of relating stories. In the centre of this formidable circle was placed a carpet for the relater of the story to sit upon, around whom were to be placed many persons who had made interest to be present.

The day having at length arrived, the Cotwall, after Durbar had broken up, advanced, expressing his readiness to attend for the purpose of relating his story. The Nuwab fixed the hour of one, and retired to take his mid-day repast. All being ready at the appointed hour, and the Nuwab having taken his seat on the throne, and the ladies arranged in order behind the curtain, awaiting the commencement of the entertainment with breathless impatience, the Cotwall was ushered in, and, having bowed to the ground three times, was desired to be seated on the carpet; and, silence having been commanded, he commenced the tale contained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COTWALL'S STORY.

IN the year 1708, after the death of the mighty Aurungzebe, and many years previous to the invasion of India by the all-conquering Nadir Shah, all the country between the rivers Sutlej and Jumna was involved in bloodshed and confusion, occasioned by the war between the Sikhs¹ and the Mahommedans. To add to the terrors of the times, the season of the periodical rains commenced with unusual violence; a storm arose which the oldest inhabitant had never before witnessed; every petty stream and nullah were soon converted into deep, broad, and impassable rivers. The thunder rolled and the lightning flashed most awfully, whilst the wind bore down before it the stoutest trees of the forests in the district of Bhabar; whilst the swollen rivers of the Sutlej and Jumna were seen bringing down the wrecks of cottages and the carcasses of cattle, with many an unfortunate man clinging to the fragments of the former, or hanging on the stiffened limbs of the latter.

'Allah, protect us!' said old Nina to her husband (an old herdsman in the district of Bhabar), as they sat muffled up in their

¹ Nanac Shah was the founder of this sect: his father was of the Cshatree caste.

coarse shawls, in the centre of their miserable hut. 'Allah, protect us, husband ! I fear every gust of wind that comes will bury us beneath the ruins of our cottage.'

'Tis indeed a dreadful night, Nina ; but I do hope, nevertheless, our hut will weather the storm. Light a fire, wife ; the sight of it will be cheerful.'

Nina obeying, the alarmed couple eagerly approached its exhilarating blaze. As the fire began to warm their cold-stricken limbs, their fears became gradually lessened. The wind dying away, was succeeded by heavy rain, which Nina found far more inconvenient than the wind, coming down in torrents through their fragile roof, composed only of the leaves of the Palmyra, which the gale had completely disarranged ; so that the poor couple were unable to find a dry spot in their humble abode. To sleep whilst the warring of the elements thus continued was impossible, and the blazing fire was therefore their only consolation.

'I wonder how the war goes on,' said old Budr-ed-din, the herdsman ; 'surely hell must have dispatched its chief fiend in the person of the bloody Banda. Alas ! many are the deeds of horror I could relate of that ferocious bigoted Sikh.'

'Surely, husband, is he indeed so bad ?'

'Is he indeed ? There's a question ! Did not he first plunder Foujdar Khan, the governor of Sarhind, and then bring his hell-hounds to kill the wife and helpless children of poor Vizier Khan ; and, not contented with that, polluted the mosques, dug up the dead bodies, and exposed them to be devoured by wild beasts ? And have they not already subdued all the country between the Sutlej and Jumna, and actually made inroads into the province

of Sáhárunpoor, within a short distance of Delhi itself? And do not they inhumanly murder all they fall in with who refuse to conform to the religion, habits, and even dress of the Sikhs? ¹ What do you call this but bad? It is the act of a demon. Pray Allah our commanders may subdue them.'

'Let us hope so, husband,' said Nina. 'Surely our Emperor Farakseir will make arrangements for their destruction.'

At this moment a knock at the cottage-door caused the trembling inhabitants to start up in wild affright. 'Who is there?' demanded Budr-ed-din.

'An unfortunate Mahommedan, wounded, and almost starved,' replied a voice from without.

'Pray admit him, husband,' said the benevolent Nina. 'God knows now-a-days we are bound to assist our friends, particularly a soldier; and perhaps he may give us some account of the war; so get up and let him in.'

'Wife, there may be danger.'

'Well, if there is, we shall soon find it out, in time to prevent it.' Here the knocking continued, and the voice from without became more loud and earnest in its supplications for admittance.

Budr-ed-din, moved by the prayers of the suppliant without and the advice and requests of his wife within, slowly opening the door, ushered in a tall, thin, half-naked man, without a turban, his hair forlorn, and dripping wet around his shoulders; he appeared to be about the age of forty-five; and though miserable

¹ Gúru Govind, the last religious ruler of the Sikhs, ordained the sect should invariably be clothed in blue. The Acalis are a class of Sikh devotees, who wear blue chequered cloths, with steel bracelets.

to a degree, preserved the dignity of a soldier of some consequence. Having dried himself by the fire, some food was set before him, which he eagerly devoured, and then seemed disposed to lay himself down in some corner to obtain a few hours' repose. Nina, however, anxious for the news, the expectation of hearing which alone induced her to prevail upon her husband to admit the stranger, begged he would inform them of the state of the war. 'Has the Emperor engaged the Sikhs?' said she.

'He has,' replied the stranger, in a low and hollow voice.

'And are we again defeated?'

A nod was the only answer.

The herdsman, lifting up his eyes, exclaimed, 'Then has our last hope deserted us; we must all change our religion and customs, and become Sikhs.'

'You must,' said the stranger; 'therefore prepare.'

'But, brother,' said the herdsman, 'this is a curse on the land, a very hell upon earth. What, is all the world to follow Banda and his accursed crew?'

'Hush!' cried Nina; 'I hear the sound of horses' feet; 'tis the Sikhs—we shall be cut to pieces.'

'Conceal me, brother,' cried the stranger; 'tis me they seek. Protect me, and I promise you safety for the remainder of your lives. Deny all knowledge of anyone having this night applied to you for shelter, and the horsemen will instantly depart. If you confess, you ruin me and involve yourselves in misery for ever.'

'Where, where shall we place him?' exclaimed the anxious and alarmed herdsman.

‘The well, husband, the well; let him go down the well in the leathern bucket;¹ it is new and strong, and will bear him without doubt.’

‘Follow me, friend,’ said the herdsman. ‘And, wife, admit not the horsemen until I return; or, at any rate, delay doing so as long as you can.’

A loud halloo now reached their ears, accompanied by a violent knocking at the door. The herdsman and the stranger went out by a back door into the yard behind the cottage, where was situated the well, into the leathern bucket of which the stranger having placed himself, was lowered down, the end of the rope at the top being made fast to the beam, so that he touched not the water. The herdsman on his return perceived his wife in the act of admitting the horsemen, and protesting no stranger was under her roof.

‘Come, come,’ said one of the men, ‘this won’t do; we know the fugitive must have taken shelter here, so produce him.’

‘Indeed,’ cried Nina, ‘no one has been here on this dreadful night.’

‘This dreadful night, old woman, is the very and most likely reason why the man we are in quest of should have applied to you for shelter. Produce him, and an immense reward is yours.’

The sound of reward caused the old couple to hesitate; and Budr-ed-din, catching an approving glance from the eye of his faithful wife, by degrees confessed that a stranger was concealed in their hut, and that he would willingly produce him.

¹ This is a large contrivance, being a whole bullock’s hide, suspended to an iron hoop four feet in circumference.

‘Ah!’ cried the horseman, ‘I thought we could not have been mistaken. And is he clothed in blue?’

‘Why, as to clothing,’ said the herdsman, ‘he had very little of that about him.’

‘Is he tall?’

‘Yes, very.’

‘And wounded?’

‘Slightly.’

‘’Tis him. Produce him, or you die.’

‘Oh! Allah!’ cried the terrified Nina, ‘I will show you where he is; but you must all help to bring him up to light again, and that, too, silently, or he will slip through your fingers.’ Saying which the whole party, which had now alighted, followed the herdsman to the well, not so quietly but the prisoner heard their cautious steps and anxious whisperings. Convinced there was no chance of escape were he to suffer himself to be drawn up in the bucket, he felt around him, and fortunately discovered a cavity in the wall of the well occasioned by age; and quitting his bag, effected a lodgment for his feet, clinging to the protruding stones and bricks with his hands and fingers; justly concluding the bag would be once more lowered when they found he was not contained therein. He had scarcely effected his purpose, when the bag was slowly drawn up; and when arrived at the surface he heard a violent blow, accompanied by an exclamation of ‘Friend, take that!’ This he concluded was a stroke of a sword given in full expectation of its falling on its victim. An altercation now arose, accompanied by the tears, prayers, and assertions of the herdsman and his wife, who both swore by the Koran that the

stranger had been lowered down the well, and they were unable to account for his escape, unless he had climbed up the rope and gained the adjoining jungle.

‘Wretches!’ cried one of the horsemen, ‘little know ye whom ye have protected and suffered to escape. All future woes which may, through his means, befall the Faithful must be attributed to you. He whom you have shielded is Banda, the Demon Banda!’

A shriek from the old woman was all the wretched Banda (for it was indeed him) heard. The old herdsman, fully as much concerned as the horsemen, slowly and thoughtfully lowered the bag as before; and, when all was quiet, the prisoner once more took his station therein. Not hearing a sound, he attempted to climb up the rope, but weak and suffering from his wound, he found it was impossible, and was therefore compelled to remain until the bucket should be drawn up in the morning, and trust to chance for his escape. When he had remained in this situation about an hour he fancied he heard a whispering on the brink of the well, and soon after a voice, which he recognised to be the treacherous herdsman’s, called to him, saying, ‘Oh, brother! oh, stranger! the soldiers are gone now. If you are below, speak. You may come up now without fear.’

As it was impossible for the prisoner to put any more confidence in these people, he wisely maintained a profound silence, and soon heard his host retire, saying, ‘Curse the villain! he is indeed either drowned or escaped.’

The old woman blamed her husband for his want of penetration in not discovering who the stranger was; and the old man

retaliated on his wife, by complaining of the unsuitable place she had chosen for his concealment.

‘We should have had such a reward ; think of that, husband !’ said Nina.

‘And now, probably, we shall lose our heads ; think of that, wife !’ said old Budr-ed-din.

‘Oh, melancholy day !’ exclaimed the old woman. ‘I thought the storm augured no good.’

‘Heaven protects us, wife. Let us sleep if possible till morning.’ Saying which, he led the way to their lowly pallet.

Early in the morning, Budr-ed-din, perceiving the rains regularly set in, determined on drawing up the bucket from the well, for the purpose of depositing it in his cottage until the dry season should once more demand its use.

‘You may as well draw it full of water,’ said his wife, ‘as I require some.’

To do this it was necessary to yoke their bullock to the rope, which being accomplished, the signal was given (the bag having been previously lowered into the water, to the great inconvenience of Banda), the bullock slowly pulled up the bag, the herdsman walking by its side. A violent scream from his wife, who had just popped her head out of the door, immediately in front of the well, caused him to turn round his head, when, to his amazement and horror, he beheld the gaunt figure of the fiend Banda standing in the bucket, who, fearing lest he should be again lowered down the well, sprang up to the beam, and, cursing the treacherous couple, on whom he vowed revenge, gained the ground, and immediately took to the neighbouring jungle, leav-

ing the herdsman and his wife wrapt in profound wonder and astonishment.

‘Oh! husband, why did not you let go the rope?’ said Nina.

‘Idiot!’ replied her spouse, ‘how could I? The bullock held it.’

‘Then why did not you cut it when you heard me scream?’

‘Silence!’ said the angry man. ‘Were I to cut the rope every time you scream I should be a rare customer to old Hubul-bhae, the rope-maker. You see he is off again. Our prisoner has indeed escaped, so we had better not say a word on the subject, should any of the soldiers return.’

‘I will now,’ said the Cotwall, ‘either continue the story or, as it approaches the hour of your highness’s refreshment, defer doing so until to-morrow at the same hour.’

The Nuwab, consulting with the fair Persian, decided that the tale should be continued on the following day; and that in future it should be understood that the hours to be devoted to hearing the tales should be from one till four, at which hour the Nuwab was accustomed to have coffee and enjoy his hookah, and the ladies their principal meal. After that hour his highness enjoyed an hour’s sleep, and then, in the cool of the evening, proceeded to the gardens of the Mahmud-a-baugh palace, from whence he returned not until long after sunset.

On the following day the Cotwall thus resumed his tale:—

Before I follow the footsteps of the fugitive Banda it will be necessary to give a short account of the sect to which he belonged, and explain how he became vested with so much power and authority as to render himself so formidable to the Mahommedan

Government. The founder of the sect called the Sikhs was Nanac Shah. The Sikhs were controlled by their religious rulers, of whom the tenth and last was Gúrú Govind, upon whose death, the Sikhs having no regular successor to look up to, his place was supplied by a Bairagi, a devoted follower of Gúrú Govind's, named Banda, a man of violent, revengeful, and sanguinary disposition, firmly attached to all the religious practices of the sect invented by its founder, and scrupulously adhered to by his preceptor, Gúrú Govind. Finding himself looked up to by the whole sect, Banda determined to aggrandise himself and extend the Sikh country. For this purpose he commenced plundering all the petty Mahomedan chiefs round about him, and then entered the province of Sarhind, and engaged with the governor, Foujdar Khan, under pretence that this man above all others was most to be abhorred, from having slain the infant children, a boy and girl, of the holy Gúrú Govind. His followers, equally delighting in deeds of revenge and bloodshed, flocked around his standard, and completely vanquished Foujdar Khan and his army, giving no quarter to anyone. Not content with this, they slew the wife and children of Vizier Khan and many of the helpless inhabitants of Sarhind, committing many other horrible acts, many of which have been already spoken of by the terror-stricken Budr-ed-din, the herdsman.

Banda had two sons, the elder named Ajit Sinh, and the younger Zorawer Sinh, upon whom he relied to support the sect after he should be numbered with the dead. These were youths of undaunted courage, but differed greatly, however, in their dispositions; the former possessing all the ferocity of the father, and equally bigoted to the religion and customs of the Sikhs, whilst

the latter, though of a daring spirit, had an open and generous mind, and was by no means so devoted to the Sikh faith and religion.

The hitherto successful Banda, having conquered all the Mahommedan governors of minor importance between the Sutlej and Jumna, at last had the temerity to invade Sáhárūnpoor, a city within a few miles only of Delhi; upon which the Emperor Farakseir, determining to take effective means to subdue him, ordered his general, Samad Khan, to engage the Sikhs and put every one of them to the sword. Banda appeared on the field with a numerous army, arranged in three divisions, the main body headed by himself, and the other two by each of his sons. Knowing how very formidable a body he had to contend against, he summoned his two sons, giving them instructions for the order of the battle, and commenced administering to each a solemn oath to support the religious tenets of the sect as long as a drop of blood flowed in their veins. Ajit Sinh, the elder, had already taken the oath; and Banda was proceeding to administer it to Zorawer Sinh, the younger, when, his camp being suddenly surrounded by the enemy, he was under the necessity of arming himself for the conflict.

The battle was long and bloody, and terminated in favour of the Mahommedans, who put many of the Sikhs to the sword, retaining but few prisoners, amongst whom was Zorawer, who concluded his unhappy father and brother had perished in the conflict. Samad Khan, the Mahommedan general, in refraining from sacrificing Zorawer, was ignorant of the rank of his captive, and on account of his youth alone spared him, giving orders that

he should be conducted a prisoner to his fortress in the province of Sáhárunpoor, in which he himself usually resided.

To this fortress Samad Khan, having been rewarded by the Emperor for his bravery and successful victory, retired ; issuing orders for its security against any body of Sikhs who might be assembled in the adjacent countries. Zorawar was permitted to be at large within the walls of the fortress, but on no account to presume to pass the gates. His apartment was situated at a distance from the family of the general, which he understood consisted of one daughter only, although an expensive seraglio was maintained, wherein the gallant commander spent a great part of his time. To Zorawar, accustomed as he had been from his infancy to ramble unrestrained in the jungles and over the mountain heights, fearless, and undaunted by the howlings of the wild beasts, or unmindful of the approach of the no less ferocious banditti which infested the country, his present restrained condition became particularly irksome and irritating.

One night, having suffered his mind to dwell upon his present unhappy lot, as he stood at the window of his apartment—which looked out upon a thick and gloomy jungle—in order that he might enjoy the air of heaven, he fancied he heard soft strains of music, accompanied by the most melodious voice. Fearing to breathe, lest a note should escape him, he distinctly recognised the well-known song commencing with

Mutrib e Khoosh Nuwa bigo tazū bu tazū
Nou bu nou.¹

¹ Songster sweet, begin the lay,
Ever new and ever gay, &c.

‘Oh, heaven!’ he exclaimed aloud, at the conclusion of the delicious treat, ‘what enchanting sounds!’

He imagined his rapturous exclamation must have been overheard, for a window was hastily closed, and all was silent as the grave. Who it was that had so charmed him he could not determine. The Harem, he knew, was situated in quite a different direction; it was impossible, therefore, it could be any of its fair inhabitants; it must be the general's daughter. She alone could enjoy the privilege of singing at that late hour in the night. Where was her apartment? above, below, or to the right or left side of the one he inhabited? All these conjectures banishing sleep from his pillow, in the morning he arose feverish and unrefreshed. On the following night he again most anxiously listened for a repetition of the melody which on the preceding night had so gratified his senses; but, alas! all was quiet: not a sound, save the creaking of the trees in the jungle, did he hear, and in despair threw himself upon his pallet, where he obtained a short, uncomfortable sleep, from which, however, he was awoke by hearing a heavy substance fall in the room immediately above him; a scream followed, and he fancied some violence, perhaps murder, was perpetrating. He opened his door, and was proceeding to a small staircase which led, he imagined, to the upper apartments, when he distinctly saw the glare of a lamp, borne by some one descending the steps, flash on the opposite wall. He hastily retreated, and fortunate for him was it that he did so; for, keeping the door of his room ajar, he recognised, by the light of the lamp, the general himself. Congratulating himself on his escape, closed the door, and retiring to rest, arose early in the morning to ponder on the mysterious occurrences of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COTWALL'S STORY (*continued*).

AMONGST the numerous officers and servants in the fortress, Zorawer had become intimate with one only, a young man named Masood, who was the general's own page. As he was one day walking on the battlements with this youth he observed a female figure, whose form was symmetry itself, cross the courtyard of the castle. In one hand she bore a guitar, and upon the other was perched a milk-white dove.

'Who can that angel be, Masood?' enquired the anxious Zorawer.

'That lady,' replied the page, 'is our noble master's daughter.'

'And her name?' asked Zorawer.

'Is Amina.'

'She is exquisitely beautiful, Masood.'

'She is indeed, and equally amiable. She is beloved by all around her, and plays and sings so divinely that I have stood for hours to hear her melodious voice.'

Zorawer enquired no farther, and parted from his friend pensive and melancholy.

The young Sikh every night threw open his window, and was occasionally gratified by hearing the harmony which on the first

night had thrilled his very soul. One very calm night he fancied he heard a sigh, followed by a sob, from the fair inhabitant of the room above.

‘Heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘has that angel cause for sorrow? Oh! could I alleviate or assist her, with what joy would I encounter unheard-of difficulties! Yes! for her would I face the brazen cannon’s mouth, scale tower or turret, swim through the deepest waters, or fight until the last drop of my blood was shed in her cause.’

A second time accident led him one day near the lovely girl, who was watering some flowers upon the ramparts of the castle. He approached too near to allow his passing in silence, and, bowing, said, ‘Fair lady, proud should I be to be allowed to aid you in your task.’

Amina blushed as she gave into his hand a copper vessel which had contained water. Zorawer, instantly comprehending her meaning, quick as lightning, swift as the eagle darting on her prey, leaped from the ramparts and filled the vessel with water from the well in the courtyard of the castle. All this surprising and graceful activity Amina beheld with admiration, nay, even delight; and when he approached her, and on his knee presented the water, her agitation from the internal commotions he had awakened in her bosom was so great as to cause her hand to shake violently, and obliged her to turn aside her face to conceal her blushes. So confused was the lovely creature as to bestow the contents of the vessel upon flowers already watered; nor was she in the least sensible of her inadvertency until Zorawer ventured to point out the neglected shrubs, saying, ‘Have these

poor flowers been so unfortunate as to incur the displeasure of their fair guardian?’

Half-angry and half-pleased with being thus reminded of her neglect, she replied, ‘I dare not tarry longer ; they must be refreshed to-morrow.’ Saying which, she hastened towards a small door in an octagon turret and disappeared. Zorawer for some time stood gazing on the envious portal whose grating close sounded on his ear like the knell of despair.

‘Oh short, oh transitory bliss !’ he exclaimed. ‘Yet I shall see her to-morrow. Oh! how many hours ere that will arrive ! Fly! oh tardy time ; sun, moon, stars, aid me this once.’ Here he cast his eyes on the parched plants before him, and in an instant flew for water, which he quickly poured upon them. Nor was this all : he arranged the earth around them, and plucked off the withered leaves, bestowing such attentions upon them as he imagined could not but be necessary for the plants and acceptable to their lovely protectress.

Anxiously did Zorawer this night linger at his window, and at the hour of twelve was rewarded by hearing the heart-alluring melody of the Hourî from above. She sang a few verses of a song familiar to his ears, and he ventured to accompany her, but in so low and tremulous a voice as he scarcely could imagine would be heard. The music stopped ; he also was silent, angry with himself for his presumption. Again the sweet strain is heard, and after a time ceased. Zorawer, determining to let the lady know where his apartment was situated, and at the same time express his sentiments towards her, leaned forward through the window and repeated a Persian couplet beginning with these words :

I have felt the pain of love—ask not of whom ;
The poison of absence have I tasted—ask not of whom.

Not a sound after the repetition of the above was heard save the apparently cautious closing of the shutter of the upper window. Zorawer, in the midst of a tumult of emotions, understood alone by those who have experienced them, threw himself on his pallet, and courted sleep in vain.

On the following day the fair Amina visited her flowers ; and perceiving how refreshed they were, was at first astonished ; but recollecting the sick youth, she called to mind his manner, and his attentions to her most trifling wish ; and, above all, the Persian couplet which she had heard from her window. An involuntary sigh followed these pleasing remembrances, and she exclaimed, 'Would he were a Mahomedan !' At this instant the object of her thoughts, accompanied by Masood, was seen slowly approaching her. Zorawer appeared melancholy and dejected, nor was the gloom of his countenance banished even when he had joined the lovely Amina. She returned thanks for his kind attention to her poor flowers, sighing as she said, 'For these are the only pleasures I have in the castle.'

'Oh, lady !' replied Zorawer, 'would you appoint me your gardener, gladly would I watch over the tender plants committed to my charge, and strive to make the lily vie with the rose.'

This compliment caused her to blush ; and not knowing what to say, she replied, 'A rose is what I long for : there is not one amongst the collection.'

'Save thyself, fairest of all roses in the world,' said Zorawer.

‘I see,’ said she, ‘you Sikhs have found leisure to study the art of flattery, as well as war.’

He was beginning to reply, when the figure of Cassim, the captain of the guard, appeared emerging from a portal in the courtyard. Amina fled like lightning, and the disconsolate Zorawar seated himself amidst the shrubs. Masood, with whom he had been strolling round the ramparts, had informed him that the fair Amina was beloved by Cassim, who had demanded her in marriage from her father, who, however, declined the honour, having promised her hand to the son of General Adina Beg Khan, a particular friend of his.

‘Cassim’s pride,’ said Masood, ‘has been so wounded by the refusal as to sour his temper, and render him detested by the whole garrison.’

‘And has Amina seen the favoured son of Adina Beg?’ asked the anxious Zorawar.

‘She has once seen him.’

‘And does she love him?’

‘I think not.’

‘When are the nuptials to take place?’

‘As soon as the war is concluded.’

Zorawar, daring and bold in war, arduous and impatient in love, determined to supplant his rivals and bear away the prize himself. ‘I will,’ said he, ‘throw off the yoke of the Sikh faith and become Mahomedan. I have taken no oath, and my father and brother are, I doubt not, numbered with the dead. This night I will declare my passion; and, if successful, it must be a strong fort indeed that can contain us.’ At night the windows were once

more opened, and the songs commenced, in which Zorawer joined. A recitation from above was answered by an amatory couplet from below. Zorawer conversed, and was answered; he stood up at his window, and Amina leaned forward to catch the words from his mouth. This was an opportunity not to be neglected, and he declared his passion in the most tender manner.

‘Oh, Zorawer!’ said Amina, ‘think you my father, or even myself, could consent to wed a Sikh?’ . . .

‘Banish the idea!’ said the youth, ‘no longer view me in that light; I am a Mahommedan from this time; and should anyone be surprised, their astonishment will vanish when they know that I have been converted by an angel.’

‘Alas!’ said the trembling Amina, ‘Cassim claims me, although I am betrothed to Adina Beg’s son.’

‘Banish all fears, my beloved; I will succeed. Give me but your assurance of reciprocal love, and all difficulties shall vanish like dew before the sun.’

‘Oh, Zorawer! what farther proof do you require of my love? See you not that your image alone is implanted in my bosom? See you not——’

‘Enough!’ cried the enraptured youth, ‘to-morrow I will disclose my plans. Farewell, lovely Amina. The night air is keen, and we may be observed. Angels guard you, my beloved.’

‘Allah protect you, Zorawer!’ replied the maiden, as she closed her window for the night.

If on former nights the enamoured Zorawer was deprived of sleep, agitated by fears and doubts, now also by this sudden tran-

sition from despair to dreams of bliss, he was less composed than ever, and sleep refused to visit his eyelids.

On the following morning Zorawer found the castle in utter confusion, in consequence of the general having given orders to prepare for marching against a body of Sikhs whom he had learned were in the neighbourhood. Zorawer instantly requested an audience with Samad Khan, which having been granted, he offered his services to fight against the Sikhs.

‘You!’ cried the astonished general; ‘why, you are a Sikh yourself.’

‘I have been,’ replied Zorawer, ‘but am now no longer of that persuasion. I am ready to follow your standard and your religion.’

The general, fearing some treachery, declined his services, desiring him to remain in the fortress until his return. Mortified by the suspicions of the general, he retired to his apartment, whilst the expedition proceeded without him. Deprived of the opportunity of signalling himself in war abroad, he determined to open a campaign of a softer kind at home, and persuade the fair Amina to escape with him. Everything seemed to favour his plan; the general and Cassim both absent, what had he to fear? On the night of the departure of the troops he took his station at his window, and Amina, no less anxious, had already been posted at hers, above him. The aspiring youth, after repeated vows of everlasting constancy, begged to be allowed the pleasure of a nearer interview. Amina hesitated, and at last consented.

On his attempting the narrow staircase he found, however, what he had not before perceived, a strong iron door at its foot,

firmly locked within ; he rushed back to his apartment to give the melancholy intelligence ; and his regret may be well imagined when he learned his beloved had not the power to admit him, the keys being in the possession of a trusty eunuch. He attempted to climb up to her window, but, without her aid from above, found it impracticable. To witness his anxiety unmoved was impossible, for Amina felt assured he would run the hazard of falling to the ground, rather than not attempt her window. She therefore bade him wait, and soon lowered down the cotton lashings of her bed, doubled, and well-knotted. One end being fixed to the bar of her window, the amorous youth quickly ascended, contenting himself with the liberty of sitting on the frame of her window, and of thus enjoying the conversation of her he held so dear. The lovers found it impossible to separate, and Zorawer at once proposed their flight from the castle. This proposal was at first received with horror by Amina, who represented her father's anger, the dangers they must encounter, and the impropriety of the step ; but Zorawer, listening to neither the dictates of reason nor descriptions of danger, urged his plan with such earnest tenderness as at last to succeed in overcoming all the scruples of the fair lady.

The succeeding night was appointed for the execution of their designs.

‘ But how, my dearest Zorawer, how is it possible to effect our purpose ? ’ asked the agitated girl.

‘ Love can accomplish all things,’ replied her devoted Zorawer. ‘ Your consent obtained, all other obstacles are trifles. Give me all the lashings of your bed, and procure more if possible, and with them I will form a ladder so strong as not to afford a

possibility of its giving way. Be ready at twelve, and ere morning dawns we will be far away.'

All things being thus settled, and Zorawer perceiving a ray of approaching daylight, descended to his apartment, and employed himself the whole of the succeeding day in framing the ladder by which the lovers were to effect their escape. Anxiously did he await the coming hour when he should hold in his arms all that was dear to him in this world. At last the still hour of midnight arrived ; he heard the window above him opened ; he spoke, and was answered by a gentle 'Hush!' Leaning forward, he threw up one end of his ladder, and soon found it had been made fast to the iron bar of Amina's window. He ascended in profound silence, and to his joy found his beloved enveloped in a sable veil ready to leap into his arms ; he took his lovely burthen, and carefully and silently descended the ladder to his own apartment, where a second contrivance of the same sort was already fastened to his own window, from whence they descended to a low wall, where, leaving his precious charge, he leaped to the ground, bidding her to leap without fear into his arms. All this being accomplished, the lovers silently entered a thick jungle, where a narrow footpath only marked their way. So agitated was the lady that she could not speak, but pressed the daring youth to her heart. The darkness of the night, and the howling of wild beasts, often made them pause and offer up a prayer for their safety.

Morning dawned ere they had cleared the jungle, and in about an hour afterwards they reached a goatherd's cottage on its skirts. The hut was apparently inhabited, but its owner was nowhere to be found. Expecting his speedy return, however, Zorawer

deposited his lovely burthen on a lowly pallet, determining to solicit the goatherd's pardon for the liberty as soon as he should return. As the lady seated herself on the couch, she withdrew her veil, when, how can I describe the agony of the youth on beholding, not his beloved Amina, but a young woman to whose features he was an entire stranger ! The lady fell at his feet imploring his pity and his pardon for the imposition she had practised upon him. 'Listen,' said she, 'oh stranger, to my tale of woe, and I feel convinced you will pardon the deceit I have put upon you.'

When Zorawer's disappointment allowed him to be calm the lady thus began her history :—'Who were my parents, alas ! I know not, but I was brought up in the Mahommedan faith, and lived in Sáhárunpoor with an old woman of that persuasion, whom I for years considered my mother. A circumstance, however, occurred which undeceived me. One evening, as I was standing at the door of our house, a young man of consequence, mounted on a milk-white steed, and attended by a numerous band of armed men, passed close by me ; he gazed earnestly upon me, and seemed inclined to address me. At this instant a porter, with a load of white baskets on his head, passed on the opposite side of the street ; his foot stumbling, he fell, and the baskets covered the road in all directions. The horse of the young nobleman, frightened at the accident, stumbled and fell to the ground, and the young man losing his seat, rolled into the middle of the street, bruising his knee and one of his shoulders. In this state he was borne into my mother's house, where every possible assistance was afforded him. He smiled as he looked at me, and the

recollection of that smile has never been, and never shall be, effaced from my heart.

‘A splendid palanquin soon—alas! too soon—appeared, to convey away the youth, who I learned was the son of General Adina Beg Khan, governor of the province. Alas! how did all my young hopes die within me! He would, thought I, no longer remember me, a poor forlorn and helpless girl; but I was mistaken. On his departure he said, “We shall meet again.” What balm was this to my desponding mind! I lived upon his words for two whole days, at the expiration of which, although scarcely able to walk, he came to my mother’s house unattended. He swore he loved me to distraction, and my eyes plainly told him how acceptable were his vows. Our happiness was but of short duration. On the following day an officer of the governor’s household appeared before my mother, threatening her with ruin, nay, even death, if she allowed me again to see the governor’s son.

‘All this passing in my hearing, I gave an agonising scream and fell senseless on the floor. On my recovery I perceived my mother and the officer coming from an inner apartment, where they had been closeted during my insensibility. My mother, on the following day, informed me she was no relation whatever to me, and that therefore I must no longer look upon her in the light of a mother; at the same time promising me, if I would consent to forget the governor’s son, to obtain for me a suitable provision elsewhere. My agony at hearing these words was so excessive that I wept until, fatigued and exhausted, I sank into a disturbed slumber, on awakening from which the old woman presented me

with some coffee, which having drank, a heavy stupor came over me. I again sank into a deep slumber. What happened afterwards I cannot say, but on coming to my senses I found myself a prisoner in the harem of Samad Khan. I was treated with kindness and marked indulgence, but daily was my pride wounded with the governor's offers to share his bed, and as often compelled to reject them with disdain.

“Goolab,” he would say—for that was the only name I had ever known—“your denial will avail you little : what kindness cannot effect, force shall.” In this state of horror was I left from day to day, until the gentle Amina, hearing of my distress, visited me, and obtained her father's consent to my having access to her apartment. The war against the Sikas compelling the absence of Samad Khan, left me for a time unmolested ; but on his return, flushed with victory, he renewed his attempts upon me with unabated determination ; and a few nights ago, when about to put his threats into execution, I flew from his detested embrace, and took refuge in his daughter's apartment, which having gained, I fell on the floor insensible ; and on recovering I found the gentle Amina weeping over me and promising her assistance. Whether the general followed me, I cannot say ; but since that time I have not been molested by him. On the evening of the day of his departure with the expedition I obtained permission from the old eunuch of the Harem to visit Amina at the hour of midnight, she having intimated to me that at that hour she frequently sat at her window to enjoy the fresh air, and that my company would be acceptable to her.

‘On approaching the door of her room, what was my surprise

at hearing her closely engaged in conversation with a man ! I listened, and overheard your plan of elopement. The idea instantly struck me that now was my only chance of escape from the detested place, trusting to the generosity of Amina's lover, whoever he might be, to forgive the imposition. Chance enabled me to put my design into execution. One of the ladies of the Harem falling suddenly ill, at about the hour of eleven, on the night settled for your escape, I flew to the apartment of Amina, begging her to come and see the dying girl. She appeared reluctant to leave her chamber—the reason I knew but too well ; but, ever kind and attentive, she followed me to the Harem, where, whilst she was administering to the sick girl, I quickly left her. Turning the key of a door at the extremity of a long passage, to prevent the possibility of her following me, I reached her apartment a few minutes only before you threw up the ladder. The rest you know, and now I throw myself on your generosity. If you cannot pardon, kill me ; for death is preferable to again falling into the hands of Samad Khan.'

Zorawer, in the agony of his disappointment, tore his hair, and beat his breast ; nor could the unfortunate Goolab assist him by any soothing balm of consolation. Whilst raving in this perturbed state of mind, the goatherd entered.

'Whom have we here ?' said the amazed countryman. The appearance of the owner of the hut brought Zorawer to reason, and in rather an incoherent manner he apologised for his intrusion, offering, at the same time, a reward if he would conceal the lady, his companion, and deliver her to no one but himself. The old man promised obedience ; and Zorawer, turning to the afflicted

girl, said, 'Fear not, most injured fair one. I forgive you heartily—forgive you, and will endeavour to serve you. Leave us a moment, good man,' said he, turning to the goatherd; 'I have much to say in private.' The man having retired, Zorawer proceeded to paint his love for Amina, who, he understood, was betrothed to Adina Beg's son, 'your lover, gentle Goolab. Now rest awhile in this secluded retreat, and he shall be made acquainted with your situation and fly to your rescue.'

Goolab thanked him with tears in her eyes, assuring him Adina Beg's son would, when informed of her safety, never stand in his way with Amina. 'Farewell, generous and noble youth!' So saying, she stretched forth her right hand, which, to his surprise, Zorawer discovered had but four fingers. On enquiring the cause, he learned she had thus come into the world. Zorawer being satisfied, bade her adieu; and repeating his injunctions to the goatherd, whom he found standing without the door, took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COTWALL'S STORY (*continued*).

ZORAWER, melancholy and dejected, retraced his steps through the jungle; and, having arrived at its extremity, sank down fatigued and exhausted. Sleep overtook him; and, when he awoke, he was astonished and alarmed at beholding a tall thin man, armed with a sword and shield, standing over him. He fancied he was yet dreaming; but raising himself, and gazing earnestly on the stranger, he was soon convinced to the contrary, for in the figure before him he recognised his father, Banda. An exclamation of surprise burst from his lips, whilst Banda, with his arms folded, stood in sullen dignity, unmoved from his former position.

‘Zorawer!’ he at last exclaimed, ‘we meet again.’

‘Allah, be praised!’ replied the youth.

‘Ah! art thou then an apostate? or use that word from long habit, and your recent intercourse with the accursed Moslems?’

Zorawer attributed his using the word from habit, not daring to confess his apostacy to his father, who would probably have felled him to the earth the moment the fatal truth passed his lips. ‘I pray you, father, where is my brother Ajit?’ enquired Zorawer.

‘Dead!’ was the only answer he received.

‘And whither art thou going, father?’

‘Say, rather, how camest thou hither?’

‘I have escaped from the fortress of Samad Khan,’ replied the trembling boy.

‘Then prepare to enter his walls again, not as a prisoner, but as his armed foe.’

‘Father, I obey—lead on; but when I left the castle Samad Khan had departed on an expedition——’

‘In which he has been defeated,’ said Banda; ‘and we are now assembled to seize his stronghold, and steep our swords in the blood of all within its walls.’

Zorawer shuddered at the thought, but remained silent in the presence of his stern parent, and moved on to follow him towards his camp.

‘Zorawer,’ said Banda, ‘we have positive information that Samad Khan, after his defeat, fled to his castle; he is an enemy whom, above all others, I am most desirous to slay. Your brother fell by his troops, and I narrowly escaped with my life. Revenge! Zorawer, by heaven! you speak not! What means this downcast look? Wilt thou not follow?’

‘Father, I obey: I will follow. Lead on.’

‘Tis well, boy; and mind you, if I see you backward in the use of your sword, the weight of mine shall level you with the dust.’ Saying which he strode forward at a rapid pace, followed by the downcast Zorawer.

They joined the busy camp, and all pressed forward to behold their long-lost chieftain’s son, little imagining the change which had taken place. Banda compelled his dejected son to exchange

his dress for one of blue, the distinguishing mark of the sect. He sighed as he suffered himself to be arrayed, and heard the shouts of joy on the occasion with a heavy heart. In the morning, Banda, at the head of a numerous band, marched towards the fortress of Samad Khan ; and having arrived at the gloomy edifice, harangued his men, called to their recollections the havoc made amongst their sect by Samad Khan, and concluded with desiring no quarter should be given to the enemy, but that man, woman, and child should be put to death. A loud shout of joy testified how willingly his orders would be executed, and the attack soon commenced. Banda's eye was ever on his son, so that he was compelled to appear equally zealous with the rest, and was the first to scale the walls; and after a long and tedious battle the Sikhs prevailed, but searched in vain for Samad Khan. Zorawer, in running through the apartments, met Masood, who was on the point of being hewn down by a Sikh's battle-axe, when he interfered, desiring the sanguinary soldier to desist, and retain the unhappy man prisoner until further orders. The man obeyed, and conducted Masood to a dungeon pointed out by Zorawer. As soon as an opportunity offered Zorawer visited Masood.

‘Ah!’ cried the grateful captive; ‘thanks, noble sir, for your intercession, but indeed little did I expect to see you again in this dress.’

‘Masood,’ said he, ‘ask no questions. Where is Amina?’

‘Nay, my lord, it is I who ought to ask you that question, coupled with a second regarding Goolab.’

‘What say you, Masood—Amina fled? Whither can she be gone?—who—speak, Masood.’

'All I know is,' said the page, 'on the same night that you effected your escape the two ladies in question were missing also; and woe be unto you should Amina's father once more obtain power, which he will do, rely upon it, although he has returned from his expedition defeated.'

'Ah ! did he indeed return hither, Masood?'

'He did ; and, to complete his wretchedness, learned the escape of his favourite lady and lovely daughter, together with yourself, to whom he attributes his losses. He raved, calling you traitor, that would, under the plea of conversion, have followed him to the fight for the sole purpose of delivering him into the hands of the Sikhs.'

'Masood, I am no traitor ; I have not taken away Amina. But 'tis well ; I must bear my load of misery. I have spared your life ; but before my chieftain mention not Amina's name, I command you, or you die. Masood promised obedience, and Zorawer left him to ponder on the mysterious disappearance of his beloved Amina.

Banda, enraged at not finding Samad Khan in the castle, slew every soul within its walls, not even excepting poor Masood, for whom Zorawer most earnestly interceded, on the plea of his friendly disposition to him when a prisoner. The infuriated Sikh chieftain vented his rage also on the helpless women of the harem, and concluded by setting fire to and demolishing the castle.

Poor Zorawer beheld these bloody deeds of his inexorable parent with dismay and horror, which strengthened him in his determination to desert the Sikhs, and prefer instant death to being a second time witness to such acts of barbarity. The victorious

Sikhs left the now ruined fortress ; and having encamped at a distance, Zorawer found himself once more in the presence of his father, whose clouded brow testified his great disappointment in not having found the Mahommedan general, Samad Khan.

‘Pray,’ said he to Zorawer, ‘what made you so anxious for the safety of that bloodthirsty slave in the fort?’ alluding to his intercession for Masood.

‘I have already informed you, my father, that he befriended me when a prisoner.’

‘And you condescended to receive favours at his hands? Zorawer, how art thou fallen in my estimation ! If you value your life, change your conduct. You seem to cherish in your bosom a partiality for my enemies. Were I convinced of this, I would lay you a corpse at my feet. Nay, speak not ; I am this night fatigued, but to-morrow be prepared to take the oath I once began to administer to you ; at present retire. You know my will.’

Zorawer proceeded to his tent, determining in his own mind to be far enough off ere morning dawned.

As soon as he felt certain the whole camp was buried in sleep, he took his sword and cloak and silently left the tent. It was his intention to proceed to the army of Adina Beg Khan, now the most powerful Mahommedan general, and there, in the most formal manner, offer his services, and abjure the religion of the Sikhs, which seemed founded on bloodshed alone. In his road stood the goatherd's cottage, and he purposed enquiring after the health of poor Goolab. He tapped at the door, and was admitted, and enquired after the lady whom he had left under the old man's care.

A shake of the head was for some time his only answer; at last, urged by Zorawer's earnest entreaties for an explanation, the old man informed him she had been carried away. 'Yes, sir, indeed we have had sad work here last night; two, nay, four men I should say, came to me, having another lady in their arms, who, upon entering, poor thing! fainted. So, thought I, it is very lucky I happen to have another fair one under my roof, who can assist her better than any one of us men; whereupon I called to the lady you left with me, sir, and she came and willingly tendered her aid; but on seeing the face of the fainting lady she screamed aloud, and then they both screamed, and so I made out they had both come from the same place.'

'Well, good man,' said the impatient Zorawer, 'where are they now?'

'Why, that I can't tell you; all I know is, the four men carried them both away with them, in spite of remonstrances and prayers to the contrary.'

'Were these men,' enquired Zorawer, 'Sikhs or Mahomedans?'

'Oh! the faithful, sir, I can assure you; I heard one of them say, "Finding the other girl is fortunate; our master will be doubly pleased; the restoration of one of these fair ones will reconcile the governor to the loss of the other." "Ay," said another, "and our master will be as good friends as ever with him." They all seemed mightily pleased, and soon departed with the ladies.'

Zorawer, having rewarded the goatherd, proceeded on his road, pondering on the most probable place to which the ladies were conveyed. He doubted not but Cassim, the captain of the

guard, was the instigator of this violence towards his beloved Amina ; and his myrmidons had concluded that the restoration of Goolab to the enraged Samad Khan would easily appease his wrath.

Where at this moment either the general or his captain was to be found he was at a loss to conjecture ; but he determined upon pursuing his original intention of proceeding to the army of Adina Beg Khan, to whose son he would give information respecting the unhappy Goolab. Quickening his pace, he arrived at a river where a small boat was riding at anchor, apparently without any person belonging to it. He cried aloud for the boatman, who, to his surprise and joy, he found was sleeping at the bottom of the boat. The fellow quickly plied his oars and ferried him across. Zorawer failed not to enquire if four men, with two females, had crossed the river on the preceding day : he was informed they had not ; therefore, rewarding the boatman with a few pieces, he proceeded on his way.

After a fatiguing journey of two days Zorawer reached the fortress where Adina Beg then was, and which he had taken from the Sikhs. Changing his habit of blue, he appeared before the general, to whom he offered his services, renouncing the Sikh party and religion for ever. The general, pleased with his air and appearance, bade him consider himself under his command, having previously enquired into the movements of the Sikhs, whom he professed to have just quitted. On Zorawer's retiring from the presence of the general, he enquired if the son of the governor was within the fort ; and was answered in the negative, but that he was hourly expected, having dispatched a messenger to apprise

the garrison of his having fallen in with a body of Sikhs, headed by Banda himself, over whom he had gained a decisive victory, taking many prisoners ; but that the chieftain himself had escaped. ' Alas ! my unhappy, misguided father,' thought Zorawer, ' thy end is near at hand.'

It will now be proper to account for the long absence of Samad Khan and his captain, Cassim. It has been stated that this able general and his no less skilful aide-de-camp, Cassim, sallied out on an expedition against a body of the enemy, which they found too numerous for their small force to cope with. To retreat was impossible. The Sikhs, therefore, giving no quarter, induced Samad Khan and his captain to secure their safety by flight. Having, however, fought bravely for many hours, and slain Ajit Sinh, Banda's eldest son, Samad Khan returned to his castle, where, to complete his misfortunes, he learned the escape of the young Sikh, Zorawer, and the two ladies.

Certain that the enemy would attempt his fort, he dared not remain a moment longer than was necessary to secure a few jewels and valuables, with which he quickly departed, and arrived safe at the camp of his friend, Adina Beg Khan, to whom he related his recent defeat. Adina Beg sympathised with him, and courteously offered him protection ; and, with the Emperor's consent, proposed giving him a command. A few days afterwards intelligence arrived of the massacre committed by Banda at his castle, which had been entirely demolished. Samad Khan was now literally a beggar, and more than probable in disgrace at the imperial court. Nevertheless Adina Beg, from long friendship which had existed between them, contrived to keep him near his person, and con-

sulted him on the state of the war. When Zorawar had quitted the presence of Adina Beg, that general mentioned to his friend, Samad Khan, the singular circumstance of a young Sikh having become a Mahomedan, and offering his services to fight against the enemies of the true believers.

‘I hope and trust,’ said Samad Khan, ‘you have not accepted his services, for I was myself nearly deceived in a similar manner, and the fellow who professed such an abhorrence of the sect turned out to be one of its most staunch adherents and advocates. I hesitated, and at last declined his services, proceeding on my expedition without him. On my return I found this treacherous villain had not only robbed me of the choicest flower of my harem, but escaped also with my misguided daughter, whom I had hoped to have seen wedded to your son.’

‘He must have been a sad villain indeed!’ said Adina Beg. ‘But the young man I speak of, I am convinced, is of a very different character; he is open, manly, and sincere. I will introduce you to him presently; but as you have touched on the subject of the wished-for union with your daughter and my son, Noor Zuman, I think it right to tell you all my persuasions and threats are of no avail—he will not listen to me even, and seems determined to wed some low country girl whom he met with by accident. But have you not heard of your daughter?’

‘Indeed I have not; and as your son scorns the alliance, I shall take no further trouble concerning her.’

Adina Beg condoled with him on the mutual disappointment, and expressed his hope that the fair Amina would quickly make her appearance, as it was impossible to believe she could be

living under the protection of a young Sikh. Adina Beg now summoning an attendant, desired him to introduce the young stranger who had that morning arrived. Zorawer, delighted at the summons, hastily followed the attendant, and on entering the apartment of the governor, what was his dismay at beholding Samad Khan, who, looking hard at him, cried, 'By Allah and the twelve Imaums, it is the very same fellow who would have betrayed me into the hands of the Sikhs!'

Adina Beg's lip quivered with rage, and he was about to order him to be executed without delay, when Noor Zuman, who had returned, having had an interview with Zorawer, appeared to arrest the fatal blow. 'Father,' said he, 'you are both mistaken as to the character of this young man; believe me he will prove of the greatest use to us, and is sincere in his desire to embrace the true faith.'

'I confess, Samad Khan,' said he, turning to the ruined general, 'circumstances appear against the youth; but remember, you never gave him an opportunity of displaying either his disposition or his valour. Believe me he was, and is, your firmest friend.'

'Oh, very friendly indeed!' cried Samad Khan, 'to deprive me of my lady and my daughter at the same time; vastly friendly, I must confess.'

'With permission,' said Zorawer, 'I will explain the circumstances.' He then related the extraordinary mistake he had made, and his ignorance regarding the fate of the fair Amina, whom he most tenderly loved; concluding with observing, that if information was required concerning her present place of

abode, Cassim would probably be the best person to apply to for it.

‘Ah!’ cried Samad Khan; ‘is it possible. Has he dared to take this step?’

‘With your permission,’ said Samad Khan, turning to Adina Beg, ‘I will summon him before us.’

Cassim was accordingly ordered to appear, but information was brought that he had departed from the garrison at day-break.

‘It must be as you say,’ said Samad Khan to Zorawar. ‘I fear he has taken my poor daughter to a considerable distance, where he has an estate.’

‘Then is my beloved Goolab with him also?’ cried Noor Zuman.

‘Your Goolab!’ cried the astonished Samad Khan; ‘excuse me, she is my Goolab—escaped from my castle.’

‘Whither she was treacherously and inhumanly conveyed,’ interrupted Noor Zuman; ‘therefore say no more: she is mine, pledged to me ere force brought her near thyself.’

Samad Khan was prudently silent, not being in a situation to dare to venture offending the son of Adina Beg, on whom all his hopes of restoration to rank and power entirely depended.

‘My dear father,’ said Noor Zuman, ‘permit us, I beseech you, to go in quest of the ladies. Several forts belonging to the enemy require to be reduced, and straggling Sikhs are around us. Give the command of a gallant band to this distressed yet able general, Samad Khan, and it shall be our care and pride to cause him to return covered with laurels.’

‘Be it so,’ replied Adina Beg ; ‘I have received no communication from Delhi concerning my old friend, and will take upon me the responsibility.’

‘Young man,’ said he, turning to Zorawer, ‘the slightest turn of your eye will be watched ; and orders shall be given to deprive you of life on the least appearance of treachery.’

‘My father,’ said Noor Zuman, ‘I will answer for his fidelity ; nay, even pledge myself to be the first to sheathe my sword in his bosom, should I find myself deceived in my opinion regarding him.’

Zorawer fell at the feet of both the generals, and swore most solemnly to support their interests and their lives with the last drop of his blood. As a further security, the youth, previous to his quitting the fortress, solemnly abjured the religion of the Sikhs, and confessed before the priests and people assembled that he believed there was but one God, and that Mahommed was his Prophet.

As soon as the force was equipped they marched from the garrison, headed by Samad Khan. Zorawer was in the highest spirits at the opportunity which now presented itself of distinguishing himself in war and being equally successful in love. On the third day they had intelligence of a large body of Sikhs having been seen in a northerly direction. Samad Khan pushed forward, and had the good fortune to come up with them, when a bloody fight ensued. Zorawer kept by the side of the general, and by his bravery and undaunted courage convinced him of the injustice of his suspicions regarding his sincerity. Whether Banda headed this party or not Zorawer could not learn. He

secretly hoped he was not amongst the warriors of the day. The leader of the Sikhs, having singled out Samad Khan, was in the act of levelling a death-blow at him, when Zorawer rushed between the combatants and received the stroke on his shield, which was split into a thousand pieces in an instant.

‘Ah, traitor!’ cried the Sikh to Zorawer, ‘I know thee. Come on, thou vile apostate!’

Saying which he darted on the youth, with the ferocity of a tiger, and, but for his skill and cool judgment, would have annihilated him. Foiled in his attempts, he seized a spear, and was in the act of running on his antagonist, when a Mahommedan soldier stabbed him in the back, and he fell covered with blood. At a distance Zorawer perceived his general and Noor Zuman engaged with several Sikhs; he rushed to their aid, and by his single arm levelled two with the dust. The Sikh soldiers, having lost their leaders, commenced a retreat, when the Mahommedan horse dashed in amidst their broken ranks and put them almost all to the sword. From a prisoner whom they had taken Samud Khan learned that Banda, with a numerous army, was in the garrison of Loghad, a well-built and almost impregnable fortress, distant about one day’s march.

The victorious Mahommedans instantly proceeded to the place, where, after several days spent in unsuccessful attempts at escalading, they encamped, determined to starve the garrison into submission. The Sikhs were ill-provided with ammunition and food, and foresaw they could not hold out for any length of time; but, certain of the fate that awaited them if they surrendered, they ate sparingly of what they had, and thus for some time kept off

the evil day. At last they were reduced to the necessity of eating the flesh of the cow ; even Banda himself, urged by the cravings of hunger, partook of the dreadful meal. When this at last failed they opened the gates, and the Mahommedans, rushing in, put every soul to the sword. On searching for Banda, whom they had intended to have sent in chains to Delhi, he was nowhere to be found, having, on the night previous to the surrender, contrived to lower himself down from the ramparts of the fort, swim a deep and wide river, and gain a thick jungle, which, together with the darkness of the night, favoured his getting clear off.

A party headed by Noor Zuman, well-mounted, was dispatched after the fugitive ; and this party it was which had traced him to the herdsman's cottage, at the commencement of my story. How they obtained their information I shall now explain :—Banda, having cleared the jungle, found himself on a wide, extensive plain, where he fortunately perceived a white horse, bridled, standing beside a traveller, who was fast asleep. Notwithstanding the distant murmuring of the thunder and the horrors of the approaching storm, the ferocious fugitive, anxious to obtain the horse and the saddle which formed the poor traveller's pillow, drew his sword and plunged it into the unhappy man's body, seized the saddle, and placing it upon the animal's back, galloped away, leaving his victim writhing in agony. The road was rocky and uneven, and he had the mortification of hearing the shoes of the poor horse, one by one, take their departure. Aware that his safety depended on his steed, he was fearful of laming him, and entering a village, enquired for a Nalbund. It was night, and it was with difficulty the smith could be awakened. At last, by

promises of reward, he opened his shop, and lighting his fire, proceeded to his work, promising expedition, although his actions showed he had no such intention.

‘ You come from afar, sir, I presume ? ’ said the Nalbund.

A nod was his only answer.

‘ Horse is tired, sir ; you had better rest awhile.’

‘ Be quick and shoe my horse,’ said the angry Banda.

‘ I will, sir ; and feel certain, when done, you will be satisfied with my performance ; no one ever found fault with the work of Mustuffer Muzboot, for that, sir, is my name. My father——’

‘ Curse your father, sirrah ! proceed with your work, will you ? ’

‘ Curse my father ! well, sir, this is indeed strange. You little know his good qualities, sir, or you would bless him ; but surely, sir, you won’t continue your journey this night ? A storm is coming that would deter any man from exposure to its fury.’

‘ Hark ye, sirrah ! ’ said Banda, ‘ shoe my horse, or lose your head—this is all I have to say to you. Shoe him instantly, sir ! ’

‘ Bappoo, Bappoo ! up, you lazy rascal, and blow the bellows.’

A boy now crawled from a bed of dirt and ashes, and commenced, half-asleep as he was, to handle the bellows, whilst Banda impatiently paced to and fro in front of the shop.

‘ Why, master,’ said the boy, in a low voice, ‘ what a devil of a fellow this man is ! he looks, by the blaze of the fire, the most ferocious of all mankind ! ’

‘ Silence, boy, or he will slice your head off in a twinkling.’

‘ Who is he, master ? ’

‘ Some runaway, rely upon it, or he would not be riding on such a night as this. There is a clap of thunder ! ’

‘ Oh, Allah !—and the lightning, master ! watch the stranger as it flashes across his face. See how he smites his forehead ! Who can he be ? ’

‘ Hush, boy ; we will find that out somehow before morning. File the nails in halves, and I warrant the shoes won’t stay on long ; so that he must either return, or, if pursued, must be overtaken.’

Banda now enquired how much longer he should be forced to wait.

‘ Soon done now, sir,’ said the Nalbund.

‘ Boy, pare the hoofs well.’

Banda turned round once more, when the Nalbund whispered to his boy not to cut away the old holes.

‘ No, no, master,’ said the boy ; ‘ short nails in the old holes will soon make a traveller halt.’

‘ To be sure. Come, be quick.’

Saying which he hammered on the shoes as fast as possible, and when finished called to Banda, and led out his horse, saying, ‘ Never was animal better shod.’

Banda, from policy, paid the money, and soon galloped away, taking the direction of the Bhaber district.

‘ Oh, oh ! he has taken that road has he ? ’ said the Nalbund. ‘ Recollect that, boy. Now look out for his pursuers ; rely on it they are not far off. Call me when they approach. I warrant we shall give them valuable information, and gain an immense reward.’

Saying which he once more sought his pallet, leaving the boy to keep watch at the shop-door.

Banda lashed his poor steed over the uneven rocky ground,

thinking it was now next to impossible to be overtaken ; but to his surprise he found the horse becoming lame ; and dismounting to satisfy himself of the cause, discovered that three of his new shoes were off, and the fourth hanging only by a single nail. He cursed the blacksmith most heartily, who had thus rendered ineffectual his means of escape. He attempted to mount again and pursue his way, but the animal stumbled and fell. Finding the horse an incumbrance, he left him to his fate and proceeded on foot, whilst the gathering storm had now reached the height of its fury, and spread around havoc and devastation. Trees close to the spot where he stood were by the lightning's blast shivered from top to bottom, or fell before the violence of the gale. In such a night as this the stoutest heart would naturally seek for shelter ; and the forlorn yet not despairing Banda, entering the village in the Bhabar district, tapped at the cottage of Budr-ed-din, the herdsman. The reception and treachery he there experienced has been at the commencement of the tale fully related.

On escaping from the well Banda penetrated the adjacent jungle, intending to take refuge in the Punjab, where he still entertained hopes that a number of Sikhs would adhere to him. On the third day, however, exhausted from fatigue and hunger, he laid down on the skirts of the forest, fully expecting there to breathe his last. The sound of a bell tinkling at a distance, however, once more raised his drooping spirits, and he patiently awaited the approach of the animal around whose neck it was no doubt fastened. He conjectured rightly, for a flock of goats appeared, driven by an old man of prepossessing appearance.

‘ Aid me, good man,’ said Banda, ‘ or I die.’

The goatherd raised the half-expiring Banda, and led him to his cottage close by, where milk and bread having refreshed him, he enquired in what part of the country he then was ; and learned, to his great disappointment, he had been travelling the direct contrary road from that he had been anxious to pursue. The goatherd offered the shelter of his hut for a day or two, saying, 'Let us hope, however, that no more women will be brought hither (for this was the very cottage to which Amina and Goolab had been conducted).

'Ah!' cried Banda ; 'females brought hither ! By whom?'

'Why,' said the goatherd, 'not long ago a young man came to my hut, and in my absence deposited a lady on my pallet. When I arrived he apologised for the liberty, informing me the female was destitute, and begged my protection, which I promised.'

'What description of lady? Describe her figure and face,' said Banda ; 'and tell me where she came from.'

'Whence she came I know not,' replied the goatherd, 'and I saw but little of her person ; however, upon taking leave of the young man I perceived she had only four fingers on her right hand ; whether the left had its proper complement or not I cannot say.

'What do I hear?' exclaimed Banda ; 'four fingers only ! 'tis—it must be her. Describe the young man, her companion ; and say, canst thou not guess whence they came?'

'The young man was handsome, tall, and fair-complexioned, and I fancy they came from Samad Khan's fortress beyond the Jungle.'

'Tis Zorawer !' cried the infuriated Banda. 'Has he again since visited you?'

‘He has, lately, dressed as a Sikh; but on the former occasion he was habited as a Mahommedan.’

‘Grant me patience!’ cried Banda; ‘’tis he, beyond doubt. But say, who was the second woman?’

The goatherd related the whole history, of the lady being brought by four men, and of their removal of the first lady with four fingers.

‘And did they both come from the same place?’

‘I imagine so,’ replied the goatherd, ‘for they evidently recognised each other.’

Banda pondered for some time on the intelligence he had received, and then enquired whither they had gone.

‘That I cannot possibly inform you,’ said the old man; ‘all I know is, I was heartily glad to get rid of them, and have since troubled myself no more about them.’

I must now leave Banda to his meditations, and proceed to relate how the indefatigable Noor Zuman, son of Adina Beg Khan, had been enabled to trace his fugitive to the herdsman’s cottage. The pursuing party for some time saw not a human being, but at last groans of a most distressing nature reached their ears; and following the direction from whence they proceeded, they came up to the poor traveller, who was writhing under the torture of the wound inflicted by the merciless Banda. It was evident the unhappy man had not many hours to live; his speech was, however, yet left him, and he gave such an account of the brutal manner in which he had been treated, and the robbery of his white horse, as left no doubt in the minds of his hearers that his murderer was Banda.

Noor Zuman, although anxious for immediate pursuit, and unwilling to spare any of his men, nevertheless appointed four of his followers to convey the wounded man to the nearest village, and desired them to bestow every attention upon him. He pushed on with as much speed as the darkness of the night and the violence of the storm would permit, and passed through the village where lived the consequential Mustuffer Muzboot Nalbund, at whose shop-door he was hailed by the watchful Bappoo, who, enquiring if they were in pursuit of any person, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, awoke his master, who gave all the information in his power, saying, 'I warrant he is not far off; I took care of that.'

'How?'

'By shoeing his horse in a particular manner, so that the shoes will all come off again ere he proceeds many miles.'

Noor Zuman praised the shrewdness of the Nalbund, informing him of the condition of the wounded traveller, who would soon arrive in his village, desiring that he would attend to him, and a reward should be given him for his services. Mustuffer promising to do his best, the party again set off towards the Bhabber district. They had not gone far when they perceived a white horse standing under a tree without a rider, and moving onwards arrived at the herdsman's cot, where they justly concluded Banda had taken shelter.

Your Highness is already informed of what took place at the cottage, and can conceive the mortification of Noor Zuman on finding the fugitive had again eluded them. Not conceiving himself authorised to make further pursuit, he gave the order for

returning to the camp of Samad Khan. On passing the shop of the Nalbund his mortification and regret at their want of success was excessive. He informed Noor Zuman that the wounded traveller had arrived, and died soon after, in which report he was confirmed by the four men left to escort the wretched man.

Samad Khan and Zorawer had been anxiously awaiting the return of Noor Zuman, and were all greatly vexed, save Zorawer, at the escape of Banda.

All that now remained to be done was to proceed to the retreat of Cassim, for which purpose Samad Khan gave orders to move towards that direction as quickly as possible. In their march they took and demolished several small forts of the Sikhs ; and after a wet and tedious march arrived at the estate of Cassim, which they surrounded, meeting with no opposition. Upon entering the Ghurrie, or mud fortification, they learned that Cassim was confined in a dungeon underground, his followers having mutinied and refused to obey his orders. Zorawer, anxiously enquiring after Amina and Goolab, learned with delight they were safe within the walls of the fort. He flew to them, and in an instant held his Amina to his throbbing bosom. No less anxious was the brave Noor Zuman, who appeared before the amazed and too happy Goolab, leading forth Amina.

Zorawer, in presenting her to her father, exclaimed, ‘Here, sir, is your daughter ; and now I trust I have proved my sincerity in your cause.’

‘You have, noble youth,’ replied the general ; ‘and now receive your reward !’ Saying which he placed the hand of his

lovely daughter in that of the enraptured Zorawer, and pronounced a blessing upon them.

‘Sir,’ said the generous youth, ‘here is also the hitherto forlorn Goolab, who for years has loved the son of your old friend, until fraud and oppression placed her in your hands : will you not consent to be instrumental to their happiness also?’

‘I will,’ replied the general ; ‘and here publicly declare I have no further claim on the lady.’

The delighted Noor Zuman threw himself before him, excess of joy preventing his giving utterance to his feelings.

It is to be remembered Samad Khan was now very differently situated than when first introduced to notice. He was now a dependent on Adina Beg Khan, the father of Noor Zuman; his restoration to his former rank and dignities depended on his favourable report : it was therefore his interest to conciliate and please his son by every means in his power ; and he therefore hesitated not to waive all claim to the fair Goolab, especially as he was fully aware of her deep-rooted aversion to himself.

The happy party now prepared to return, having previously liberated Cassim, whom the General immediately dismissed from his service. Cassim withdrew, muttering some insolent remark on the valuable service of a broken-down commander. After a tedious journey, owing to the heavy rains, they reached the fort of Adina Beg Khan, where with pleasure he learned the overthrow of the Sikhs in all directions, and the recovery of the daughter of his old friend, as well as of Goolab, whom he was now firmly convinced was most ardently beloved by his son, Noor Zuman, to whose nuptials with the sweet girl he at once consented ; and it

was settled that on the same day Zorawer should receive the hand of the lovely Amina. All now was tranquil; not a single unpleasant event appeared likely to ruffle the harmony that prevailed at the castle of Adina Beg Khan, who had reported so favourably of the heroic deeds of his friend Samad Khan that the Emperor of Delhi bestowed upon him the government and charge of an important fort and a numerous band of soldiers.

One rainy night, as the inhabitants of the castle were wrapt in silence, a loud cry was heard from without, and permission having been given to open the gates, a body of Mahommedans entered, bringing a prisoner, wounded apparently very dangerously. It was the unfortunate Banda, captured by Cassim, who by this act imagined he should once more be restored to his former favour and rank. The joy of Adina Beg was so great that he caused rejoicings to be made throughout the fortress, and instantly penned a despatch to Delhi, to know how he was to dispose of his prisoner. In the night Zorawer determined to visit his afflicted father, and to give him all the consolation in his power. He found no difficulty in obtaining permission from the officer on duty, and entered the cell where, upon the floor, comfortless and forlorn, lay the wretched Banda.

‘Father!’ exclaimed Zorawer.

‘Hell-hound!’ replied the prisoner; ‘why comest thou to molest me? Hence—away! accursed apostate! Oh! had I strength to rise and plunge my dagger in thy heart, this moment would be thy last.’

‘Father,’ said Zorawer, ‘be calm—compose yourself; I come to give you comfort.’

'You !' said Banda ; 'you bring comfort—impossible ! the sight of you is worse than death : yet have I still some regard for you ; and, as you must live, what I can unfold may prevent your involving others in the misery you are preparing for yourself. For their sakes I will make a disclosure, which, when you have heard, may induce you once more to return to the faith in which I have brought you up. I know all your plans ; I have heard of your elopement with the Mahommedan woman, and have now to ask you if you indeed intend to ally yourself with that detested one ?'

'I do !' replied Zorawer.

'Then will you complete the catalogue of your crimes—for you will wed your own sister.'

'Heavens !' cried the amazed youth ; 'I never knew you had a daughter ; but this girl is the offspring of Samad Khan !'

'So she may consider herself,' said Banda, 'and as such would he most likely palm her on you.'

'Is she, then, indeed your daughter, my father ?'

'No, boy, she is not, but is nevertheless your sister.'

'Impossible ! she cannot be.'

'I tell you she is : has she not four fingers only on her right hand ?'

'Protect me, heaven !' exclaimed Zorawer : 'there is a lady as you describe her ; but she is not the one to whom I am about to be united.'

'Then would I had not disclosed the secret ; but, however, rest satisfied—the girl with only four fingers is your own sister.'

'But how, father, if not your daughter ?'

'Because thou art not my son.'

‘Speak, I implore you ; tell me who, then, is my father.’

‘I will speak, because when thou shalt know all I have to relate I trust thou wilt see grounds for forsaking the accursed race to whom thou art rashly about to ally thyself ; and if anything can induce you to pursue the right road it will be the information that thou art the son of the revered and departed Gúrú Govind, the tenth and last religious ruler of the Sikhs.’

‘Oh, Banda ! how have you amazed me by this disclosure ! How can this be possible ? Have not I been bred up in the belief that I am thy son alone ?’

‘Listen, boy. I became ambitious to succeed Gúrú Govind, my master and protector ; but you stood in my way, and marred my aspiring thoughts. I determined upon removing you, but durst not seize you, permitting your sister to remain, lest suspicion should attach itself to me. An opportunity offered : Foujdar Khan invaded our territories ; it was then I caused you and your sister to be snatched away, reporting to your father that the relentless Foujdar Khan had murdered his helpless babes. He made me swear to revenge the bloody deed ; and, in order to induce a firm belief of my report as soon as I had it in my power, invaded the territory of Foujdar Khan, slaying every soul that came in my way. When all was quiet I went a journey in secret, and returned bringing you with me, leaving your sister under the roof of an old woman of the Mahommedan persuasion in Saharunpoor. I gave out you were my son by a woman with whom I had formed an alliance on the borders of Cabul ; and as from my wandering life no one could contradict my report, you were received and acknowledged as my younger son, whom I had hoped would

in due time have succeeded to the chieftainship of the Sikhs, and that this would in some measure atone for my wicked act in depriving the Gúru of his children. I have no more to say but that since I find you have embraced the Mahommedan faith, were I able I would plunge my dagger in your heart and die content. As it is I am wounded unto death; I feel my hour rapidly approach: leave me—begone!’

‘How am I to satisfy my sister of all you have informed me?’ said Sorawer.

‘Send for the old woman from Saharunpoor; she will confirm my statement. Begone!—leave me to die in peace!’

This most extraordinary intelligence shocked and confounded Zorawer, who hastened to communicate it to his friends, and to embrace his new-found sister, Goolab. All were greatly amazed; for none, indeed, had ever imagined Zorawer had considered himself the son of Banda, or they might probably have mistrusted him, notwithstanding all his oaths of fidelity to their cause. A messenger was dispatched to Saharunpoor, who brought the old woman under whose care Goolab had resided. She confirmed the tale, though she knew not it was Banda who had consigned the girl to her care. That there might be no doubt on the subject, the prisoner, dying as he was, being brought before the assembly, the woman, on seeing him, exclaimed, ‘That is the man!’

That Zorawer should, in attempting to elope with his mistress, be the means of rescuing his sister, was considered a miracle ordained by Providence; and all congratulated him on his good fortune in possessing a sister so amiable as was the fair Goolab. The firman from Delhi arrived, directing Adina Beg Khan to exe-

cute the prisoner Banda without delay. Preparation was made accordingly; but on entering his cell life had for ever fled—the vital spark was extinct. Banda was therefore buried in privacy, and the grave never closed over so unrelenting and cruel a man, whose whole life had been spent in bloodshed and carnage, and for whom no eye was moistened, and for whose loss no one mourned. After the death of Banda the Sikhs were a long time ere they again appeared in the field; they never elected another religious ruler, but chose their military chiefs at their assembly called their *Gúrú Mata*, or National Council.

The marriage of Zorawer with Amina, and of Noor Zuman with Goolab, took place shortly after the death of Banda, amidst loud and continued rejoicings. The Mahommedans—as, please Allah, they ever will be—continued triumphant over the Sikhs; and, by their continued victories, added another star of glory on the brow of the all-conquering, world-subduing Emperor of this noble country.

Thus ended the Cotwall's story, with which the Nuwab expressed himself well-pleased, and permitted him to depart. The whole of the heads of professions attended at the Deewan's palace to cast lots to determine who was to be next to relate a story. The lot fell upon Buxoo-bhae, the barber, who was desired to be in readiness on the following day, at the hour of one, at the Nuwab's palace. Poor Buxoo hastened home to repeat before his wife the only tale he could muster up, in order that he might be perfect on the following day. The Nuwab and his ladies being all seated as before, the barber was ushered in; and having made three low salaams, took his seat on the carpet and commenced

CHAPTER XV.

THE BARBER'S STORY.

‘ATTEND, oh inhabitants! listen to the orders and proclamation of the mighty Cazee!’ said the town-crier of the city of Agra, as he paraded its spacious streets, beating a small drum, whose monotonous, well-known tones had attracted a crowd of persons around him. ‘Whereas a female, named Sooria, daughter of Mohammed Istukbul, the merchant, having been, it is supposed, carried off by some person or persons unknown, this is to give notice, that whoever will give such information as may lead to her discovery shall receive a reward amounting to one thousand rupees; and should the offender or offenders be discovered and convicted, a further reward of five hundred rupees will be given by the Government to whomsoever shall be instrumental to their apprehension. And further, should it be proved the retreat of Sooria should be known to any person, and such person refuse to give information, he shall be punished as the Cazee Ahmak shall direct. This is according to orders.’

Immediately behind the crier walked a dejected and melancholy youth, who seemed deeply interested in the proclamation, and who, the gazing multitude learned, was Azum, a young officer

of the Nuwab's body-guard, to whom the lost Sooria had been betrothed, and whose nuptials in a few days were to have been celebrated. Everyone deeply commiserated his situation, and sympathised with his grief. Three days had elapsed since the mysterious disappearance of the lady, during which time the anxious Azum had night and day employed himself in searching for his beloved. The father and the weeping mother of Sooria had also been indefatigable in their attempts to recover their lost child, but all in vain—she could not be found.

As the last resource, the afflicted parents applied to the Cazee, who immediately lent them his assistance; and the merchant professing himself ready to give any sum of money, could he by that means once more behold his child, the Cazee proposed that a public proclamation should be made, announcing to the inhabitants the whole state of the case, with an offer of one thousand rupees from the merchant, and five hundred on the part of Government, for the apprehension of the offenders, or for information whereby the lady could be found. This being acceded to by the merchant, the crier, as before-mentioned, bellowed out his information at every corner of the city.

Cazee Ahmak had but lately succeeded to his office of magistrate, on the death of his revered father, Cazee Mahommed Kabil, an able and learned man, whose decease was mourned by the whole city. Pure and impartial, his justice checked the tyranny of the rich, whilst it shielded and protected the rights of the poor. His justice, like the waters of Noorshervan, spread blessings on all around him. His son and successor, Ahmak, alas ! was very different. He commenced his Cazeeship by giving feasts and grand

entertainments, by the frequent indulgence in which, naturally inclined to obesity, his ignorance increased, and his intellect became weaker as his body became larger. This continual feasting, although it enlarged his person, tended considerably to reduce his patrimony, which was small, but sufficient, had the Cazee managed with prudence, to have enabled him to maintain an establishment suitable to his office. His stock of ready money would have entirely vanished but for his able treasurer, from whom he found it impossible to wring a single rupee beyond the fixed monthly expenditure.

This treasurer was his wife, who, seeing the dissipation increase, had remonstrated with her spouse on the folly of reducing himself to beggary in order to feast a set of ungrateful sycophants, who, when they could no longer fill their bellies at his expense, would never come near him again. She succeeded in obtaining the key of the strong box in a fortunate moment, when the Cazee happened to be less gorged with food and more open to conviction than usual; and having once got possession, ever after refused to give it up. Finding the Cazee tamely submit to this check upon his desires, she by degrees chained up the curb a little tighter, till at last he was entirely in her power, and she managed him as she pleased. The Cazee perceived the ascendancy she was gaining over him, and frequently meditated turning restive, but the judgment and discretion of his wife Lama was so indispensable, both in public as well as in private affairs, that he was under the necessity of bowing to her will.

Having got rid of troublesome and gluttonous visitors, Lama next turned her attention to the Cazee's establishment within

doors; and was in the act of meditating some very serious retrenchments, when her husband approached with an affable smile, which she well knew foretold a demand on the treasury. She determined upon granting his request, provided he could convince her of the real necessity of the expenditure.

‘Lama,’ said he, ‘I want three hundred rupees.’

‘Three hundred rupees, Cazee Ahmak! In the name of wonder, what can this immense sum be required for?’

‘Now, don’t be angry,’ said the Cazee; ‘but some time ago I promised my favourite flower of my harem a shawl and pair of silk trousers; she has just reminded me of it, and I require the sum for this purpose.’

‘Do you?’ said Lama. ‘Very well; wait a minute, until I return.’

Saying which she left the delighted Cazee, and proceeded, not to the treasury, but to what her foolish spouse called his harem, an old room, containing three miserable women. Arrived at the door, Lama burst into the apartment, and the unhappy females, who had dreaded her increasing power, crouched up in one corner, fearing even to look upon the angry Lama. ‘Come, come, my ladies!’ said she; ‘your time is up. Here, Maimoun (calling to a slave), give me your cane.’

The rattan being presented, the determined Lama was by no means slow in using it; and desiring Maimoun to throw open the doors, she fairly beat the poor creatures into the street, with threats of vengeance if they presumed to return or be seen in the house again. Having thus, with a few strokes of the rattan, accomplished one of her projected retrenchments, she returned to her spouse.

‘Well, my good Lama, where is the money?’ anxiously enquired the Cazee.

‘Why, my dear Cazee, I fancy you will not require the sum now; and if you will go to your harem, I think you will be of the same opinion.’

Not knowing what is wife could mean, but evidently alarmed, he arose and went to the sacred place, which he found entirely deserted. At this he was mightily wroth, and returned to his wife determined to assert his authority.

‘Don’t talk to mè,’ said the persevering Lama; ‘I tell you that henceforth there shall be no shawls and silk trousers in this house but my own. You keep a harem, indeed! Why, I wonder you should ever think of such a thing, or that I was ever fool enough to submit to it. Look at this,’ said she, shaking a rattan; ‘if ever I see a woman in this house again, rely on it she shall feel the weight of this cane pretty soundly. Am I to be reduced to beggary by your profligacy? For shame! Mind your public affairs, and look well to the supporting your dignity. Whilst you are loitering in what you call your harem, others are stepping over your head and supplanting you at court.’

‘Nay, wife, I am not aware of this.’

‘No, you are not aware of any calamity until it actually happens. But pray remember how foolish you appeared last year, when Syud Wukoof took your place on the right hand of the Moolah, when the prayers were read at the Ead-gar after the Ramzan, on that great day when everyone is tenacious of his rank and precedence. Now the Ramzan is again approaching, and you mean quietly to submit to see the place that was ever filled by

your father, and by all the Cazees that ever were before him, wrested from you by that crafty Syud ; so that in time he will establish his claim. For shame, sirrah ! Go, set to work and assert your right, and don't talk to me of harems and silk trousers. You idiot ! you would not leave money enough to buy yourself a pair were it not for me. Go, likewise, sirrah, and find out the stolen lady : it is your duty to aid the afflicted parents. What avails your town-crier bellowing out his confused account of the business ? Exert yourself for once, and gain the applause of the city.' So saying she retired, leaving the Cazee dumbfounded at the decided manner and unaccountable eloquence of his wife.

On his emerging from the apartment he found his secretary awaiting him with a bundle of papers, containing depositions in the case of an affray.

'What is the head and tail of the business ?' enquired the Cazec ; 'that is all I want to know, and then I can come to the point ; and then I come to a decision, and then to the punishment ; and by that time it will be time for refreshment. The secretary begged him to descend to the hall, and he should quickly be made acquainted with the particulars of the case.

'Ay, ay, I am coming ; but on our way you can just tell me the nature of the affair.'

'It is an intrigue, my lord, and a beating received by the intriguer from the hand of the injured husband—the one party complaining, and the other party complaining.'

'Oh ! what a puzzling case ! But you know how severe I am in these cases : I never let the culprit off. No, no ; honest men must be protected.'

'True, my lord ; but the intrigue is denied.

‘Then who am I to punish? I don’t half like it. Go, my good man, and see if you cannot effect an amicable arrangement between the parties. It is astonishing what a deal of trouble this method will save.’

The secretary did as he was desired; but, alas! soon returned, with a woful shake of the head, saying, ‘It won’t do, my lord; you must decide the case.’

‘Was there ever anything so provoking! I wish I could bring my wife into court,’ thought the Cazee; ‘she would soon find out the truth of the matter. Well, I will go down at any rate; perhaps I may chance to stumble on the proper person to be punished; and if there is any doubt, why, I will not be severe; but if all is perfectly clear, then the villain shall get it soundly.’ With this wise determination the learned Cazee took his seat on his carpet at the head of the hall; and after stroking his beard and attempting to look vastly fierce, cried, ‘Who is the complainant?’

‘I,’ cried one voice; ‘And I,’ cried another.

‘What! two complainants! Who is the defendant, then?’

To this there was no answer; upon which the Cazee was mightily disturbed, not comprehending how one plaintiff could be at variance with another.

At last the secretary arose, saying, ‘If it please your lordship, I will explain——’

‘Explain to me, sirrah! What do you mean? Do you think I don’t comprehend the whole subject? That fellow (pointing to the injured husband) has been intriguing. I see he has: I know it by his eyes! Oh! you abominable man!’

‘My lord,’ said the amazed plaintiff, ‘I come to complain

against this man (pointing to a stout, impudent-looking butcher); 'he it is who has been intriguing with my wife.'

'Well! just as if I did not know that!' said the Cazee. 'I knew it long before you spoke. Besides, who gave you permission to open your mouth? You are the defendant, and must not presume to utter a word until the plaintiff has told his story.'

'No, my lord,' said the secretary; 'he, the thin man, is the plaintiff, and the fat man is the defendant.'

'To be sure he is! did not I say so? Those thin, meagre fellows are always complaining about something. I knew he was the complainant the moment I set eyes upon him.'

'But I, my lord,' said the butcher, 'am the complainant.'

'No, no!' said the Cazee; 'that is impossible! I desire you will not confuse me.'

'My lord,' said the secretary, once more attempting to put the matter in as clear a light as possible, 'they are both complainants.'

'There you go again! Now, how is it possible they can be both complainants?'

'They complain, my lord, on different subjects, although connected with the great ground of dispute; and it is for your lordship to decide which of the two has justice on his side.'

'Oh! that is it!' said the Cazee, not wiser than he was before. 'Well, then, let the fat man begin; and mind, don't both speak at once.'

'My lord,' said the secretary, who had been feed on the other side, 'the thin man ought to begin, being——'

'Silence, I say! The fat man shall begin: I will have it so.'

The butcher then stated that on the preceding evening he had

occasion to go to the tailor's shop—'This, man my lord, is the very tailor himself.'

'Well, well, go on !' said the Cazee ; 'I knew he was a tailor well enough; could have sworn it by his look. Go on, good man.'

'Well, my lord, his shop was shut up; and so, as I was anxious to deposit a piece of cloth with him to be made into trousers——'

'Don't talk about trousers, but come to the point,' said the Cazee.

'Well, my lord, I went to the back part of his house, and it was then dusk ; and seeing no one, I called out " Ho, Simpee !" ¹ but no answer. I called again, and then the window below was opened by his wife, I believe. I told her my business, and we chatted together a little.'

'Oh, you did, did you? Go on, sir.'

'Yes, my lord. I did not see any harm in speaking a word or two.'

'No, no, I dare say not.'

'I asked for a cup of water, and the woman was pouring it into the hollow of my hands, and I was about to drink it, when I received a violent blow on the back part of my head from this man, the tailor, and three others of his caste, a set of Hindoo fellows, who beat me for half-an-hour, and then went away, giving me much abuse ; and this is what I complain of.'

'Very well; now hold your tongue,' said the Cazee. 'Call forth the tailor, the defendant.'

¹ Tailor.

‘My lord,’ said the tailor, ‘I am not the defendant ; I am the complainant; and had you permitted me to speak first——’

‘Silence, sirrah ! or you shall not speak at all ; for, as I did not let you speak first, you must of necessity be the defendant, and defendant you shall be, I am determined. I wonder how you dare presume to dictate to me who shall be plaintiff and who defendant !’

The poor tailor then began his tale, saying, ‘My lord, this butcher has been after my wife these six months, and is always bringing his scraps of cloth, first for one purpose and then for another, and particularly in my absence from home—always coming in the dusk of evening. Now, I ask, would any honest man——’

‘None of your impertinent questions, sirrah,’ said the Cazeer, ‘but proceed.’

‘Well, my lord, I had positive information that things were not going on as they should do——’

‘What things, fellow ? needles and thimbles ?’

‘No, my lord ; I mean—that is—I suspected——’

‘Oh ! you suspected. So because you suspected you thought yourself warranted in assaulting this worthy man. By Allah ! this is the most unheard-of, wanton attack on an innocent man ! I knew you had a lame story to tell. Now, you impudent fellow ! I shall cure you of giving trouble for nothing. Fine him fifty rupees, and put him in prison for ten days !’

‘My lord,’ said the secretary, ‘if you will allow him to continue his history——’

‘I allow him, indeed ! Why, I should be as bad as himself.

No, no ! my time is too precious to waste in hearing such abominable lies. Away with him, I say !'

Thus was the case disposed of, and the wrong person punished, the butcher being indeed the guilty man.

The Cazee joined his wife Lama, whom he found employed scolding the servants, and finding fault with all around her. 'For the love of Allah !' said he, 'leave off this railing, and get me some dinner. I am tired and worried to death. Such a difficult cause I have had to decide ! My brain is quite in a whirl.'

'Ay,' said Lama, 'and I warrant you have decided wrong after all.'

'Now, Lama, you never were so mistaken before in all your life. I have given the case the deepest consideration.'

'Then, Cazee, I know you have done wrong; for when you begin to consider it seems to me as if you were endeavouring how far wrong you can possibly go, for the result is, in general, contrary to the rules of wisdom.'

'Nay, wife, when I married you I deeply considered.'

'And for once did right, Cazee. But this is indeed a most extraordinary affair regarding the disappearance of the merchant's daughter. I hope you mean to exert yourself, Cazee ?'

'My dear wife, what would you have me do ? Have not I dispatched spy after spy, messenger after messenger, and all to no purpose ? What avails attempting to find that which is irrevocably lost ?'

'Ah ! that is your way in everything : give it up in despair—that is your way of succeeding in any undertaking.'

‘I have tried all in my power,’ said the Cazee; ‘and old Peerbhae, my servant, tells me it is no use to worry myself any more on the subject. And there is the Ramzan coming on; I should die outright were I to harass myself during that season of starvation; as it is I am grown very thin!’

‘Why, you abominable glutton, you are twice as fat as any man in the city! What more would you wish for?’

‘I wish for many things not to be had. Let us have a nautch,¹ wife?’

‘No nautches here, I can tell you!’ said Lama: ‘let others who can better afford them throw open their houses; besides, it is no amusement to you, who always go sound asleep.’

‘That is true enough, wife; but then it is an amusement until I do go to sleep, you know.’

‘And one for which you have to pay five hundred rupees.’

‘That is true again; but then one must not expect to be amused for nothing.’

‘Go and read your law-books, and study the Koran—that is the proper amusement for a Cazee!’

‘Oh, wife! I wish I were not a Cazee!’

‘There are many,’ returned Lama, ‘who wish the same; for, God knows, you are little fit for it.’

‘All are not of the same opinion, that is one comfort,’ said Ahmak, calling to Peerbhae to bring his hookah.

At this instant news was brought that Azum had imagined he had found some clue to the discovery of Sooria, and requested further aid from the Cazee.

¹ Dance.

‘I am heartily glad to hear he has been so successful, and that I shall have no more trouble in the business. Let him come up; I will first aid him with my counsel, and secondly with my people and police Peons.’

‘The first he will dispense with,’ said Lama; ‘the second he may thank your for.’

‘Well, let him come into my presence.’

The young man was accordingly introduced, and, having made a low salaam, returned thanks to the Cazee for the assistance he had already received at his hands; but hoped he should not be considered troublesome if he requested further interference from him.

‘Sit down, young man, sit down,’ said the Cazee. ‘Yours is a very delicate business, and I have bestowed the deepest consideration on the mystery; and I must say (don’t let it grieve you) that to find a runaway woman is a very difficult job.’

‘Indeed, my lord, so I find it.’

‘Oh! you see I am right.’

‘But, my lord, to find a woman run away with by a man is a much more difficult undertaking.’

‘Precisely what I was about to observe, young man.’

‘But perseverance, my lord, and your kind assistance may do much.’

‘Young man, you are very sensible. Now, are you sure the lady loves you?’

‘Am I sure the sun shines, my lord?’

‘Why, in your present perturbed state of mind, you may be mistaken as to whether it does or does not shine. However, I

promised my wife—that is, I promised myself—that I would give you the assistance of my counsel, and so I will. My advice is, to think no more about the girl ; let her take her chance, let her roam the wide world—she will again experience by it ; and, between ourselves, I think you are a lucky fellow, for a wife is the most troublesome, unaccommodating piece of furniture you can provide yourself with.’

‘ So you may have found it, my lord ; but excuse me if I do not follow your advice, which, I must say, somewhat surprises me.’

‘ Well, then, young man, go to work your own way ; but I understood you thought you had gained a clue to her place of abode ; if so, all my people are at your disposal.’

So saying, he called to an attendant and desired him to dispatch, in company with Azum, all the guards at present at liberty. The young man returned thanks and retired.

Lama now entering the room, enquired into the plans of the youthful Azum.

‘ Oh ! ’ said the Cazee, ‘ he is, like all young men, hot and impetuous : he thinks he is going to find his beloved, to pounce upon her without any more ado ; but wise heads, like mine, know better : the thing is impossible, or she would long ago have been discovered.’

‘ It is indeed strange she has not been found,’ said Lama. ‘ But now eat a good meal, for to-morrow begins the Ramzan.’

The Cazee wanted no second command on this head, and crammed down pilau and curry till he could do so no longer, and

then fell into a sound sleep, from which he awoke not till the voice of the Muezzin disturbed him.

‘Curse that bellowing jackass!’ said the Cazee; ‘he has broken my sweet sleep, the soundest I have enjoyed for many a night.’

‘Hush! thou profane man,’ said Lama. ‘Up and go to prayers. This is a holiday, and ’tis your duty to be seen at the mosque.’

The Cazee arose, and having washed, with a grave face went to prayers, and the rest of the day was spent in yawning and longing for the evening, when the rules of the *Ramzan* would allow him to gorge once more. Anxiously did he watch the progress of the sun and count the tardy hours; lie down, get up again, walk about, press his empty stomach, and ask his wife a thousand times how long it would be ere the sun would set, crying, ‘Oh, Allah, how hungry I am!’ In this manner passed the whole of the month of the *Ramzan*.

The unhappy Azum visited the Cazee at the conclusion of the fast, as unsuccessful as ever, and with tears in his eyes reported to the Cazee his failure.

‘Sorry, very sorry, sir,’ replied the magistrate. ‘But pray don’t come to me again, at any rate before the *Ramzan* is quite concluded.’

The unhappy Azum retired melancholy and dejected.

On this day the Cazee, with permission of his wife, gave a great feast, and had invited the Mufti, the Moulvi, and the Nuwab’s Sheristadar, and the Deewan, and many other respectable persons. The company assembled soon after sunset, and the

Cazee received them with his wonted politeness. Lama had been indefatigable in her attempts to set forth a dinner fitting such an assembly of learned and powerful men ; and Ahmak, her spouse, did ample justice to the repast, by eating and stuffing from every dish set before him. Hookahs succeeding, conversation became general, and Ahmak took the opportunity of his proximity to the Deewan to say :

‘ Pray, my Lord, have not I a right to stand to-morrow on the right hand of the Moolah, on the reading of the Kutbah ? ’

‘ To be sure, Cazee, it is your place ; who can dispute it ? ’

‘ Why, my lord, Syud Wukoof not only disputes, but takes it. ’

‘ If that is the case, Cazee, ’ said the Deewan, ‘ be in time to-morrow at the Durbar, before the procession moves on, and I will mention your case to the Nuwab, and gain his consent to removing the Syud from his place—that is, from your place—and will myself hand you to the Moolah, before the prayers commence. ’

The delighted Cazee returned many thanks for the proffered kindness, promising to be at the Durbar in good time. Coffee being introduced, and more hookahs smoked, the party at an early hour separated.

Lama was well pleased with her spouse for his application to the Deewan regarding his rank on the approaching festival, and bade him mind and be in time. Peerbhae was summoned, and ordered to get ready the Cazee’s best Kemcaub trousers and coat. He proceeded to obey ; but, on opening a chest, discovered some envious mouse had eaten a hole in the said Kemcaubs, so that it was impossible they could be worn.

Lama and the Cazee were both much mortified at this accident. 'However,' said the former, 'you must wear those you now have on ; they are your next best, and are of the finest silk.'

'Why, what are you doing, Cazee Ahmak?' said Lama, seeing him employed in studiously covering himself with his coat.

'Wife,' said he, 'don't be angry ; but the fact is, I have unfortunately spilt a huge dish of pilau over me, and my silk trousers are, I fear, spoiled.'

'Was there ever so slovenly a fellow!' said she. 'Now, I warrant ye, the Mufti did not soil his clothes, nor the Deewan his ; but you, in your hurry to begin to gormandise, must needs soil your trousers. Now to bed, sir, and take off your clothes, and we will see what can be done.'

The anxious wife, having examined the trousers, found them far beyond her art to purify ; and, throwing them aside, summoned Peerbhae, desiring him to carry the trousers to the washerman's, and be sure to have them ready by twelve on the following day. Peerbhae began to urge the lateness of the hour and other difficulties ; but Lama, commanding silence and implicit obedience, dismissed him from her presence.

Early on the following morning old Peerbhac went to the Dabee, where, after waiting nearly two hours, he received the trousers, cleaned and ironed ready to be worn. The old fellow was particularly careful of the silk trousers entrusted to his charge ; and, lest his fingers should soil them, tied them up in a handkerchief. The washerman living some distance from the city, Peerbhae passed in his way many delicious gardens. On his return, determined to possess himself of some of the tempting fruit which

hung in clusters over the wall or fence, he laid down his bundle, and snatched greedily at the fruit, which, under the shade of a mango tree, he quietly enjoyed. Casting his eyes upwards, however, he became alarmed on seeing the height of the sun, and snatching up his bundle, ran as fast as he could until he arrived at his master's house. The first person he saw was Lama. -

'Where have you been, you idle vagabond?' said she. 'It is past twelve, and your master is not gone to the Durbār.'

Peerbhac laid all the blame upon the Dobee, and presented the trousers to his angry mistress, who hastily ascended with them to the apartment of the Cazee, who as quickly put them on.

The palanquin being ready, he took his departure; but, alas! found on his arrival at court everyone already assembled. He made a very awkward apology, and took his seat. He was hot and confused, besides which he felt very uneasy by suffering a most unaccountable and sharp biting all over his legs. For some time he managed to endure the agony without evincing any external signs of uneasiness; but at length, finding the pain increase instead of diminish, he made the most extraordinary grimaces, so that he was observed by everyone; and the words 'Look at the Cazee!' 'Look at Ahmak!' ran round the hall from one to another. The Deewan, amazed at this buffoonery, whispered in the Cazee's ear that the Nuwab had noticed him, and bade him sit quiet for the love of Allah. The Cazee, perspiring at every pore, could only answer, 'Oh, indeed I can't help it!' Then he scratched himself violently; and at last, unable longer to bear the torture, whatever it was, sprung up from his seat, uttering an agonising exclamation. The Nuwab, angry at this, what he called

want of decorum, desired him to leave the Durbar ; or, if he were sick, to proceed to the doctor without delay. Poor Ahmak insisted he was quite well, but at the same time, not being able to explain what was really the matter with him, was led from the Durbar, deposited in his sedan, and proceeded homewards. Safe in his palanquin, he determined on ascertaining the cause of the torment he had endured, and accordingly pulled off his trousers, which he found were covered with red ants, which sufficiently accounted for the pain he had experienced. On his arrival at his own house his wife was standing at the door, and seeing him alight without his trousers, cried, ‘ For shame, Cazee ! what is the meaning of this ? Have you been flogged ? Or what can have happened ? And why are you returned before the prayers are read ? ’

‘ Oh, Lama, Lama ! I am the most unfortunate of men. I have been tormented by myriads of ants, which that careless Peerbhae must have suffered to creep into my trousers, and was thus forced to leave the court. I am ill, very ill ! Let me go to bed. Where is old Peerbhae ? ’

‘ Gone to the Ead-gar, to be sure, where you ought to have been, you disgrace to the name of Cazee.’ Saying which, she gave him an angry push, and left him to go where he pleased.

The unhappy Cazee, it must be confessed, had good cause to feel mortified and vexed at the result of the day. By the carelessness of his servant he was, first, too late ere he arrived at court, and then became the laughing-stock of the whole company ; obliged to return home, and give up his long wished-for place at the right hand of the Moolah. But all these were trifles compared to the

agony of mind he suffered on his return home ; for, although he was agitated and distressed, he nevertheless was enabled to see his wife standing at the door of his house, as I have before mentioned. Not that this would have given him much cause for alarm ; no, there was another cause, of far greater importance, for near her stood the poor tailor, who had so unsuccessfully complained against the butcher.

Imagine not, your Highness, that the supposition of his having complained to Lama of the injustice of his decision gave rise to so much terror in the breast of the Cazee. No, there was another cause, to which alone he could attribute the tailor's interview with his wife. Whether the tailor had already divulged to Lama what he had it in his power to do, or whether he had fortunately arrived in time to prevent the disclosure, he could not decide. If the latter, then he would have reason, he thought, to rejoice at rather than lament the occurrences of the day, and bless, rather than curse, the stupidity of his servant Peerbhae ; but if the disclosure had been already made, 'My coming home,' thought the Cazee, 'has been of no avail, and I have still reason to blame my servant.'

The Cazee, as he rolled about on his bed, strove to persuade himself that no communication could have been made to his wife by the detested tailor. 'Though,' said he to himself, 'they were both standing at the door ; but perhaps he had but that moment been admitted ; and again, perhaps he had just finished his tale and was about to depart.' To determine this point was far beyond the capacity of the Cazee, or indeed of any one similarly situated. 'Let me see,' said he to himself : 'wher

I first saw them, the tailor was behind my wife—no, stay, he was rather on one side of her, I think. Then they must have changed places, for he certainly, when I looked up the second time, was in front, standing on the step of the door. Now, had I seen him in this position at first, I should have had no doubt but that he was in the act of coming in ; but, certain that I saw him either behind or on one side, I much fear he was coming out.’ After deep cogitation, he thought he would enquire of the servants, but he recollected they were all gone to the Ead-gar ; so that after much time spent in musing on the probabilities of what had or what had not taken place, he found himself just as wise as he had been on his first setting to work to determine the point.

The Cazee, rejoicing at the conclusion of the Ramzan, descended to his eating-room, where he met his wife, whose conduct he determined most narrowly to watch, and whose every turn of eye he intended to scrutinise. He could perceive no change, however. So pleased was he at this discovery, that he entirely banished from his remembrance the mortifications he had undergone at the Durbar. ‘Perhaps,’ he thought, ‘the tailor may have complained of my decision against him ; I will bring up the subject, and sound my wife a little.’ Dinner being concluded, and the Cazee’s hookah placed behind him, after a few whiffs, during which he was considering how and in what manner he had better commence the business, he said, in a careless manner, ‘Did not I see the tailor, Daghabhae, here, when I came from court?’

‘Yes, Cazee Ahmak ; he has been here.’

‘Oh ! I thought it was him. Did he come on business?’

‘Yes, on business, Cazee.’

‘What business?’ he would have liked to have asked, but durst not. So the silence was interrupted alone by the monotonous gurgling of his hookah.

Not wishing to let the subject drop, however, he said, ‘Strange fellow, that tailor!’

‘Is he, Cazee?’

‘Yes, rather. Don’t you think so?’

‘No; I can’t say I see anything very strange about him; he’s thin and poor.’

‘Ay, that is what I mean.’

‘But surely, Cazee, that is not very strange; there are plenty in the city as thin and as poor as himself.’

‘Plenty, wife; true, plenty. But this man is famous for carrying about old news; did he bring any to you?’

‘Yes.’

‘What?’

‘That you were an unjust and an ignorant man.’

‘Ha, ha!’ said the Cazee, laughing; ‘I dare say he thinks so; and so does every dissatisfied suitor, rely upon it.’ Saying which he puffed away at his hookah, now entirely satisfied the fellow had merely been complaining about the issue of his cause.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARBER'S STORY (*continued*).

IT will now be necessary (said Kuzil-bashee, the barber, continuing his narrative), to inform my noble hearers of the nature of the communication made by the tailor to the Cazee's wife.

Daghabhae the tailor, imagining the Cazee would, on the solemn occasion of the conclusion of the Ramzan, proceed to the Ead-gar, determined on that day to solicit an interview with Lama, his wife, for the purpose of communicating a very important secret wherein her husband was deeply concerned. The tailor, in so doing did not anticipate any personal benefit beyond the pleasure of revenge and petty spite against Ahmak, for the injustice he had received at his hands; nor had he the slightest intention of injuring the unjust Cazee beyond a good scolding from his wife.

After the Cazee had sallied forth to the Durbar, therefore, Daghabhae, who had watched his palanquin, made his way towards the mansion, wherein he found Lama entirely alone, all the servants having proceeded to the Ead-gar.

Daghabhae being a well-known character, Lama, as soon as she saw him, cried, 'How now, Daghabhae? Not gone to the Ead-gar to-day?'

‘No, madam!; I have taken this opportunity of paying my respects to you.’

‘Oh! you have some cause in hand, I suppose; but you know I never interfere in business.’

‘Indeed, madam, you are mistaken; I had a cause, and a good one it was, but I gained no justice nevertheless.’

‘Ah! friend, how was that?’

‘You must ask the Cazee, madam; he can best inform you.’

‘Come, let me hear your tale,’ said Lama.

Upon which the tailor related the whole of his grievous case, not forgetting the injustice of her husband, Cazee Ahmak. Lama pitied him, but assured him she could in no way assist him, the decree having been carried into execution.

‘For the injustice committed upon myself, madam, I care not,’ said the tailor; ‘but when I see others suffering injuries from the same hand, I think it my duty to put a stop to the commission of them, if possible.’

‘What now, Daghabhae? A friend of yours has also suffered, I suppose?’

‘Yes, madam, a very great friend, and one whom I hope will ever continue to be so to me.’

‘Who may this person be?’

‘Yourself, madam.’

‘Me!’ cried Lama; ‘why, what injury have I to complain of?’

‘None, until I tell you of its existence; but I fear you will be angry with me for my officiousness.’

‘No, I will not, I promise you; so go on—out with all you know.’

‘ Did you, about four nights ago, hear any noise in your apartment, madam ? ’

‘ Noise ! no !—what mean you, robbers or fire ? I am sure I heard nothing, or the Cazee either ; but he sleeps so sound that it is no wonder he did not hear.’

‘ There you are mistaken, madam ; I see it is you sleep so very sound, not your husband.’

‘ What mean you ? ’

‘ Four nights ago, madam, about the hour of twelve, as I was shutting up my shop, having been obliged to work night and day for the present festival, some one carrying a basket brushed past me, and even touched me : the touch caused the lid of the basket to fall off, and out tumbled bread, cakes, rice, sugar, and sweet-meats. The person carrying this sweet load stopped and turned round to pick up the fallen food, when, the night not being very dark, I discovered to my surprise the countenance of Cazee Ahmak.’

‘ Are you sure, tailor, it was him ? ’

‘ I will swear it on the Koran.’

‘ Proceed.’

‘ Well, madam, he walked on so rapidly I almost began to doubt whether it was indeed the Cazee ; so determined to follow him. I did so, and traced him.’

‘ Where, where ? Tell me where directly,’ said the impatient Lama.

‘ Why, madam, that is what I do not know, for I was fearful of coming too close to him.’

‘ So you lost him, did you, you booby ? ’

‘Patience, madam—where was I?—oh! I traced him to the Jummah Musjid,¹ from thence to the Pinjereh-phool,² and here I lost him.’

‘And so what I most want to hear you are ignorant of?’

‘Stay, madam, I beseech you. On returning home I mused upon the subject, and determined on watching the following night, not doubting but that I should certainly be more successful. I took my station at the hour of eleven near your house, and there I might have stayed all night, for no Cazee came, though I counted the hours of twelve, one, and two; and so, madam, I went home again.’

‘Went home again, and found out nothing! Was there ever such an ass?’

‘What could I find out, madam, if the Cazee would not leave your side? But on the night after I took my station as before at the same hour near your house; and at the hour of twelve the door was slowly opened from within, and the Cazee stood in the street, cautiously looking around him. I was under no apprehension of discovery, being concealed by a low wall. He turned to the right, and I could perceive he this time carried no basket in his hand. Well, madam, your husband took the road to the Jummah Musjid, but did not exactly proceed quite as far as that holy place, but turned down a narrow lane and entered the third door on the right hand, where I, of course, concluded he would remain a few hours, and was on the point of returning, when the door of the house slowly opened, and out came the Cazee, with the same

¹ Principal mosque.

² Hospital for sick or worn-out cattle.

basket that I had observed on the first night. I followed at a distance, and saw him enter the Kubri-istan,¹ and here again I lost him.'

'Lost him, you dolt ! How could you be so stupid ?'

'Indeed, madam, I tried all I could to see where he went to, but could not. He stayed about an hour, and then emerged, bearing the basket as before. I determined to let him see that he was in my power, and stood before him, saying, "Salaam, Cazee Sahib !" He quite staggered with surprise, believing, I fancy, that I had sprung from the grave ; quickly recovering himself, however, he demanded who I was. I immediately told him my name and wished him good night, determining to inform you as soon as I could gain a favourable opportunity.'

'Daghabhae, I will reward you,' said Lama ; 'but be secret, and attend me this night at the hour of eleven ; I will take care not to be asleep, rely upon it. I intend to follow the Cazee, being determined to sift this matter ; and in order that no lock or bolt may prevent my following him into the very apartment of his paramour—for that he has one, perhaps more, there can be no doubt—have several men ready at the burying-ground, with crow-bars and other implements.'

The tailor promised obedience, and was departing, when to his astonishment he beheld the Cazee returning from the Durbar. Conscious of the part he had been acting, he sneaked behind Lama, justly considering her his shield against the expected anger of her spouse. Finding, however, he was not noticed, he quietly got out of the way, and ran home.

¹ Burying-ground.

It must here be stated that the Cazee, upon meeting the tailor in the dead of night near the burying-ground, determined, as soon as they parted, to attempt to conciliate the injured man, by undoing all the injustice he had done. He therefore called upon the tailor on the following day, made several lame excuses for the error into which he had been led, promised to punish the butcher severely, and reprobated his conduct in the most harsh terms.

The tailor coolly asked him if punishing the butcher could wipe off the remembrance of his fine and imprisonment.

The Cazee replied, 'As to the former, I will myself reimburse you by giving the fifty rupees; and as it is impossible to rectify the imprisonment, why, I will add another fifty rupees, making an even hundred for you; think of that, Daghabhae, and hold your tongue.'

'My lord,' replied the tailor, 'I shall be content with this, provided you add to it a dozen rattans on the butcher's back, in the bazaar, for his attempts at dishonouring me.'

'He shall be flogged, rely on it,' said the Cazee, who departed, hoping he should be able to seal the tailor's lips respecting his nocturnal mysterious wanderings, which he was not only anxious to conceal from his wife, but from everyone else besides. Cazee Ahmak, however, had promised more than he could perform, for on consulting his secretary he found considerable difficulty in making so total a reversion of his own sentence, passed nearly a month ago; indeed, the idea was so monstrous, that even the Cazee had sense enough to banish it from his mind altogether. The tailor more than once attempted to gain an audience with the Cazee, in the hope of fingering his hundred rupees and arranging

about the flogging of the butcher ; but the distressed Cazee ever continued to avoid an interview, and things therefore remained as before. The tailor, incensed at the Cazee's conduct, then determined to inform his wife of his nightly mysteries, and accordingly visited her, as I have stated, on the last day of the Ramzan.

Lama had not a doubt but that on this night she should discover the Cazee's hidden treasure, as he would certainly arise to go to her, having to her certain knowledge remained quiet in bed the preceding night, owing to the unusual quantity of pilau and curry he had devoured at the feast. That he might suspect nothing, however, she retired at the usual hour, and was followed by her husband. Soon after eleven she began to snore aloud, and then in a lower key, then more gently, and at last appeared to die away into a profound sleep. She soon perceived the Cazee move about, and knew he was examining the state of her eyes to see if all was safe ; he breathed gently on her face, then touched her eyes and mouth ; but she moved not, although she had the greatest difficulty to refrain from laughing, so cunning did the old fellow imagine himself. He turned in his bed, groaned and coughed, but still his rib moved not a muscle. He then gently arose, and, taking a lamp which was burning in a corner, opened a large chest, from whence he took a shawl, which, having wrapped around him, he softly and silently opened the chamber-door and glided down stairs. Lama, it may be supposed, was not long in following him. She put on a turban, and twisted a shawl around her waist, to appear as a man, to avoid any insults she might otherwise encounter from vagabonds in the streets. She heard the house-door cautiously unbolted, and then as carefully closed.

Descending, she was quickly in the street, and saw the Cazee, as the tailor had described, walking at a very rapid rate. At the low wall she found her able informant, Daghabhae, who, pointing in a significant manner to the fast-trotting Cazee, signed her to follow him. She did so, and traced her husband to the third house in the narrow lane, from whence he soon issued, bearing the basket, as the tailor had stated. Lama, from the description the tailor had given her of the sudden disappearance of the Cazee amongst the tombs, began to entertain fears of disappointment. In order, therefore, to correctly ascertain the spot, she determined to enter the house in the lane, and by threats or persuasion learn from its inhabitants the exact place to which to bring up her artillery of picks and crowbars. Accordingly, she tapped at the door, desiring the tailor to dog the Cazee, and endeavour to discover whither he went, if possible; if not, to await her coming at the entrance to the burying-ground. The door was opened by an old woman, who concluded it was the Cazee, who had probably forgotten something, for which he had returned. She therefore exclaimed, 'What is the matter, Cazee Sahib? is there anything omitted on my part?'

Lama answered not; but entering, and shutting the door, seized the old hag by the neck, swore that hour should be her last, unless she told all she knew about the Cazee, and for whom the basket of provisions was intended. The old woman, alarmed beyond measure, prayed for mercy, declaring she would disclose everything she knew.

'About a month ago,' said she, 'the Cazee visited me, some time after sunset; and enquiring into my circumstances, found I

was poor and helpless. He told me I should be provided for, and that he would give me the situation of ayah, or attendant, on a young woman under his protection. I immediately consented, and he desired me to follow him ; I did so, and was conducted by him to the burial-ground, where stands the tomb, and large building over it, of his departed father, of blessed memory. I did not much like the place, but thought I would not decline the service, until I knew the exact spot where the lady resided. He took me to his father's tomb, and opening a small door, bid me follow him. Finding he was descending a flight of stone steps, however, I cried, "Allah protect me from being entombed alive !" and then ran away, leaving him angry and mortified at his disappointment. In about an hour he called again at my house, and began abusing me for deserting him, telling me how blind I was to my own interest to throw away such a sure provision. I told him that all the wealth in the world should never induce me to go and live among the dead. Finding how determined I was, he then made me promise to be secret, and agree to cook for him ; and said he would call every other night for the provisions. I have, consequently, done so, and he has invariably called and taken away the provisions in a small basket.'

Lama having heard this tale, made further enquiries, by which she learned that this sepulchral scraglio contained only one female, whom, however, she determined to eject.

'Follow me,' she cried to the old woman, 'and point out the very door of the tomb.'

The hag would fain have been excused, but Lama was determined, and she was constrained to obey. Arrived at the

tombs, the tailor was standing ready to meet her, saying, 'He has vanished as before ; I know not where he is gone.'

'I have a better guide,' said Lama, pulling forward the reluctant old beldame.

The aged conductress approached a low door on the side of the building over the tomb of the Cazee's father, and essayed to open it, but it was fastened within. The tailor summoned his workmen, who soon commenced forcing the door by means of a crowbar ; the rusty hinges gave way, and care was taken to prevent noise, and all was contrived so quietly that it was impossible for the Cazee, unless he had been stationed close to the portal, to have heard the least sound. Lama, followed by the tailor and the workmen, descended the stone steps, and entered a long passage, all in the dark ; not a sound was to be heard. At last the glimmering of a lamp was seen in a passage to the right, and turning the corner, voices were distinctly heard ; and a female voice, sobbing and apparently using the language of entreaty, broke upon the ears of the anxious Lama. All was again silent, until the well-known croaking voice of her husband was plainly distinguished.

'Tis useless, fair one,' he said ; 'escape is impossible. Long have I been fool enough to listen to your nonsense ; and this night, I swear, shall end all dispute and altercation—resistance is useless.'

The lamp now being shifted, shed a ray on the face of the Cazee, who was standing on the outside of a large grating, or iron door, with bars placed at a considerable distance from each other. The female cried again, saying, 'Enter at your peril. I am armed

with a weapon, the weight of which shall fall on your accursed head, and thus end my misery.'

'Foolish girl,' said the Cazee, 'then you will starve, you know. Who is to bring you food if you kill me? I will venture.' Saying which he rattled a bunch of keys, exclaiming, 'You are in my power. Who shall rescue you, or who thwart my purpose?'

'I!' answered a voice which he well knew to be Lama's. He had no time for reflection, for the tailor and the workmen surrounded him and tied his arms behind him, whilst the indignant Lama stood before him, saying, 'I will thwart you, Cazee! I, Lama, thy wife. Thou unhallowed beast! to use thy father's sacred tomb for so hellish a purpose.'

'Then that accursed tailor has told all!' groaned out the Cazee.

'Release me, for the sake of Allah, kind friends!' cried the imprisoned female.

Lama, pitying the unfortunate woman, who was evidently not a willing captive, snatched up the keys, which the Cazee, at the sound of her voice, had dropped on the ground, and commenced unlocking the door; when opened, what was her amazement and grief at beholding by the light of the lamp the countenance of Sooria, the long-lost Sooria, the merchant's daughter!

So amazed was she, that her name suddenly escaped her lips, which was echoed and re-echoed through the vaults by the tailor and his workmen.

'Yes,' cried the now joyful Sooria, 'I am indeed the lost girl, and but for your providential interference might have been lost indeed; but, tell me, kind lady, is my father living, and my mother too? And where is Azum?'

‘All alive, fair Sooria,’ said the concerned Lama. ‘Oh, Cazee Ahmak, what disgrace have you heaped upon your head ! How could you have done this ?’

Here the deeply affected Lama, whose whole study of her life had been the endeavouring to preserve the respectability of her spouse, burst into a flood of tears, which moved even the Cazee himself. At last, in the hope that the affair might be kept secret, she began to promise rewards to the tailor and his crew ; but the crafty stitcher, finding how the case turned out, had quietly stolen away to give information to the girl’s father and to claim the reward of one thousand rupees.

The Cazee stood the image of despair, fear, and shame ; whilst Lama, supporting Sooria, ordered the men to move forward and quit the horrid place. At the entrance to the burying-ground lights were seen in all directions, and the whole city appeared crowding towards the spot. The foremost amongst the anxious multitude was Azum, and after him Mahommed Istukbal, the father of the lost girl, both crying, ‘Where, where is she ?’ Sooria rushed into their arms, and gave vent to her joy by a flood of tears.

All were rejoiced beyond measure ; but none so visibly delighted as Daghabae, the tailor, who was seen dancing about, rubbing his hands in an ecstasy ; and approaching the Cazee, he made him a mock reverence, saying, ‘I have hit upon the real guilty man, though my lord Cazee could not.’

Lama gave the tailor a peculiar look ; but now that the chain of power was broken he heeded her not.

It will now be necessary to relate the confession of the Cazee,

who was taken before the Nuwab for judgment ; but, as his agitation was so great, it will perhaps be better for me to state the substance of it in my own words.

The marriage of Sooria and Azum having been determined upon, the father of the former was desirous of settling some money on the bride, and to deliver up in form a house which he possessed in the city to the youthful Azum ; for which purpose, the deeds and writings requiring the Cazee's seal and signature, Mahommed Istukbal sent to Ahmak to request his attendance on important business. The Cazee proceeded without delay ; and being informed of the business in presence of Sooria and Azum, expressed his readiness to affix his signature ; but the sight of the lovely Sooria almost unnerved him, and he secretly determined to possess her for himself, if possible, before the marriage, which was appointed to take place immediately after the Ramzan. To enable him to effect his purpose force, he feared, would be required ; and he would often, late in the evening, prowl about the burying-ground, in the vicinity of which resided Mahommed Istukbal and his fair daughter. It one evening happened that, as he was emerging from the cemetery of his father, he saw the lovely Sooria come to the well near the ground for water. No one was present, yet he dared not himself seize the girl, whose screams would bring assistance to her and irretrievable disgrace on himself. What force could not effect cunning, he imagined, might accomplish ; he therefore set up a piteous cry, holding his foot with one hand. The compassionate Sooria flew to his aid ; and, seeing the Cazee apparently in pain, begged to know what had happened.

‘A snake, oh ! a snake has bitten me !’ said he, ‘and I shall surely die.’

‘Heavens ! what shall I do ? How can I aid you, sir ?’ said the tender Sooria.

‘Oh, fair maiden, lead me into the tomb, my good girl. There is a couch below ; lay me there, and let me die.’

The poor girl having with difficulty raised the hypocrite, he hobbled down the stairs, leaning on her arm, to the chamber with the iron door, where was a rude wooden couch, with some clothes thereon. The attentive and considerate girl flew to arrange the bed ; and whilst so employed, the Cazee, to her surprise, turned round and locked her in, saying, ‘Pardon, most beautiful angel ! the deception I have practised ; attribute it to my ardent love for thy beauteous self. Here remain for the present until the search for you shall cease, and let us pass the time in love and happiness.’

The amazement of the lady was so great that for some time she was deprived of the power of utterance ; but when she did find her tongue she severely upbraided him, swearing to suffer death ere she yielded herself to his wicked purposes ; calling upon him in the most solemn manner to release and restore her to her afflicted parents and betrothed husband.

The Cazee was deaf to the voice of complaint or the reproaches of injured innocence, and left her to think better on the subject. Her gaoler brought her food, cooked by the old woman in the lane, but found day after day pass without gaining a step nearer his purpose. To avoid the least suspicion, on application to him for his aid to discover Sooria, he entered into the

feelings of the distressed parents so deeply, and with so much apparent sincerity, as to succeed completely.

To Azum he afforded his servants and the Government Peons, appearing more anxious than anyone for their success. The fact of his having so great a beauty at the tomb probably reconciled him to the breaking up of his harem at home by the indefatigable and praiseworthy Lama, from whom he was most anxious to remove the least cause of suspicion. The Cazee's cunning, as far as getting possession of Sooria, succeeded ; but, like all duplicity, which sooner or later is unveiled, his also came to light in the manner and by the means I have just related.

The Nuwab was highly incensed, and was perplexed to determine what punishment to award the guilty Ahmak. For his father's sake and his virtues, he forebore to punish the Cazee by stripes in the public bazaar ; but, after due consideration, sentenced him to be deprived of his Cazeeship for ever, that his house should be razed to the ground, and that he should be imprisoned in the very stone chamber in his father's cemetery for one year, and then be expelled the city.

Poor Ahmak fell on his face, bellowing for mitigation of the sentence, but all to no effect. The tears of Lama, his faithful wife, could not prevail farther than to obtain permission to visit her afflicted spouse in his melancholy prison. The tailor received his reward, and was delighted at getting rid of a Cazee who paid so little attention to the pitiful cases of distressed husbands, and refused protection against the wiles of intriguing butchers.

The populace hooted and hissed the unhappy Cazee to that prison whose walls were to have formed his secluded seraglio.

The nuptials of Azum and Sooria were quickly celebrated, amidst the acclamations and rejoicings of the whole city.

Here the Barber, having finished his story, bowed, and was permitted to retire.

The Nuwab asked his minister and the rest of the audience their opinion of the story they had just heard, and all declared they had heard many a less amusing one, and conceived Buxoo entitled to some credit for his invention. The party attended as before at the Deewan's palace, and the lot fell upon Rajeram Kevul Ram, Captain of the Rajpoot Guard, who was accordingly ordered to be in readiness on the following day.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD'S STORY.

‘PREPARE the fire ! bring forth the murderess !’ was the dread command of the Bayezid, the founder and chieftain of the Rosheniah sect. ‘Let my eyes be gratified by beholding the torments of her who has deprived me of my only son. Oh ! Jelal, Jelal, my beloved son, how hast thou fallen ? Haste, I say : prepare the blazing fagot, and bring forth the accursed Aika.’

The guards hastened to obey their orders, and in a few moments the relentless Aika stood before the imperious Bayezid.

‘Speak murderess !’ said the chieftain ; ‘didst thou not poison my much-loved son, and thy faithful husband ?’

‘Chieftain,’ replied the undaunted woman, ‘I am in thy power ; punish if thou wilt, but I will answer no questions.’

‘Fiend ; then prepare.’

The guards seized their victim and dragged her to the place of torment, around whose soul-appalling flames an immense concourse of people were assembled. Bayezid gave the word, and the firm and collected Aika asked but the favour of embracing her friends and relations ere she closed her eyes for ever.

Her request being granted, her aged mother first approached and took a long and last farewell; then came her little sister, bathed in tears, followed by male and female cousins, friends, and acquaintances. Last came the youthful and elegant Mirza Khalil, an Afghan of Tirah, who, though he partly embraced the tenets of the sect of the Rosheniah, was nevertheless a staunch friend of the Moghuls, retaining a secret partiality for the ordinances of Islam. Mirza was a warrior, and a brave one, and had served with the deceased Jelal, the son of Bayezid, the husband of the wretched Aika. The youth attended at the melancholy execution of his patron's wife, not from curiosity, or from delighting in being witness to such scenes, but at the request of the culprit, who had, from her prison, conveyed to him her earnest desire to take leave of him ere she departed for ever. Mirza moved towards the pile, by whose side stood the unflinching Aika. She stretched out her arms to him; he approached; but instead of the parting gentle embrace of friendship found himself encircled in the arms of a fury endowed with supernatural strength, whilst from her eyeballs darted piercing glances dreadful to behold. Ere he had time to attempt to calm the infuriated woman, she grasped him by the throat and plunged him into the burning pile, following herself, rending the air with her piercing screams.

Mirza, active and bold, writhing beneath the fire's dread fury, started up, and giving a spring, bounded from the flames, overthrew all who opposed him, and escaped.

Bayezid's astonishment at what he beheld sealed his lips, and he sat in silence for many minutes, at a loss to account for the actions of his death-doomed prisoner. Fancying, however, that

Aika was anxious to add another crime to her catalogue of guilt, he rather rejoiced at than lamented the escape of young Mirza, to whom he had ever shown marked partiality. His joy was of but short duration; for the enraged Aika, finding her victim had escaped, stood up, burning as she was, and with a loud voice cried, 'Seize that monster! 'twas he who planned my husband's death; for his sake did I consent.' Thus saying, she plunged once more into the flames, amidst the shouts of the wonder-stricken multitude.

Bayezid issued his orders for the pursuit of the guilty Mirza, and the guards were dispersed on all sides; but the evening came, and no Mirza was to be found. The enraged Bayezid swore a terrible oath never to rest until the guilty wretch appeared before him, and repeated his orders for the search, offering immense rewards for his apprehension.

Mirza Khalil was a youth who, far from harbouring a wish to injure the son of the chieftain, was strongly attached to him, and had ever looked up to him, not only as his patron, but his preserver—the unfortunate youth having been rescued when an infant by Jelal himself, who, at the age of eight years, was playing with his bow and arrow in the forest, and discovered a small basket suspended from a tree, which directing his attendants to remove, he was astonished at beholding it contain a new-born infant. Jelal carried home his precious charge, and with his father's permission obtained proper nurses for the child, which continued under the protection of the chieftain's son, to whom he was firmly attached.

Mirza Khalil was instructed in the use of the sword at an early

age, and when 'old enough accompanied Jelal, his protector, to the field of battle against the Moghuls. In the very first action his undaunted courage induced him to advance too near, and he was taken prisoner, remaining with the Moghuls two years, during which time he became initiated into the ordinances of Islam. A peace being concluded, Mirza was set at liberty, and speedily repaired to his guardian, whose nuptials with a woman named Aika were, he found, then celebrating.

Mirza was received with joy by his friendly protector, and entered into the rejoicings then taking place. The bride cast peculiar glances at the handsome Mirza, which greatly embarrassed him ; but he imputed them solely to curiosity, and determined to think no more on the subject. Day after day, however, passed, and Aika's conduct was becoming more and more improper, and at last she declared she loved him, and him only.

The amazed youth begged her with tears in his eyes not to think of disgracing herself and ruining him, urging the obligations he was under to her husband Jelal. Conceiving these to be the only objections, the only obstacle to what she termed her happiness, the wicked Aika, giving way to her unlawful passion, determined on removing for ever her ill-fated spouse, and actually administered poison to him, artfully mixed up with his food. Alas ! the baneful drug had its desired effect, and Jelal closed his eyes for ever. Aika acted her part well ; she tore her hair, and beat her breast, and displayed other outward signs of inconsolable grief ; nor did anyone even suspect the cause of the young chieftain's death, much less the author of it. After some time the detestable Aika appeared before her admired Mirza, who she now

hoped would have no excuse for not returning her love ; but deeply was she mistaken. He confessed his heart beat for another object, to whom he had been attached prior to his captivity among the Moghuls. Aika stayed to hear no more, but returned, meditating revenge for the slight she had received.

Bayezid, the father of the murdered Jelal, although apparently satisfied his son died a natural death, in secret would ponder on his very sudden departure, and often entertained suspicions by no means favourable to those who resided under his roof. Could Mirza, thought he, have been so ungrateful ? No, it could not be ; besides, what end could he expect to gain by the commission of such a crime ? At last he determined to question all the venders of drugs, to ascertain to whom lately they had disposed of such articles. Accordingly, he proceeded in the dusk of the evening, in a suitable disguise, to all the shops in the place, and by these means understood that his son's wife had lately purchased poison of the most deadly quality. He instantly ordered Aika to be seized ; and on her return from Mirza, whilst planning her diabolical revenge, she found herself surrounded and dragged before the incensed Bayezid, who openly accused her of the crime. She was silent, and a trial by ordeal was in consequence determined upon, and the culprit had her choice whether the ordeal should be by the balance, by the fire, by water, by poison, by rice, by burning oil, by red-hot iron, or by images.¹ The guilty Aika

¹ Ist. The Ordeal by Balance is as follows : The accused is first weighed, and then desired to pray and go through his ablutions, after which, the crime with which he is charged being committed to paper, is folded up and tied upon his head, and he is again weighed ; if he unfortunately is made out to weigh even an ounce more than he did on the first time previous to perform-

maintained a sullen silence, and Bayezid, in consequence, fixed that the ordeal should be the red-hot iron, which accordingly took

ing his ablutions, he is pronounced guilty; but if he weigh less, innocent. Should it happen that the accused weighs on both occasions precisely the same, they weigh him over and over again continually, until his judges choose to come to a decision.

2nd. The Ordeal by Fire. A hole is made in the ground filled with blazing pippal wood, into which the accused is forced to walk barefoot; if he come out unhurt, he is pronounced innocent; if burned, guilty.

3rd. The Ordeal by Water. There are two methods of ascertaining the guilt or innocence of the accused by means of water. By the first, the accused is compelled to stand up to his neck in a pool of water, on the banks of which is an archer, who letting fly an arrow, the accused is desired to dive his head under water; if he can keep his head under the water until the archer bring back his arrow, the accused is pronounced innocent; but if he raise his head to recover breath before the arrow is brought back, he is decided to be guilty. The second Ordeal by Water is as follows: Certain idols being washed in water, the accused is forced to drink some of it: if after fourteen days' time sickness visit him, he is pronounced guilty; if no sickness appear after that time, he is decided to be innocent.

4th. Ordeal by Poison. The accused, attended by Pundits, performs his ablutions. Seven barleycorns of Vishánaga, a poisonous root (white arsenic), being mixed in eight mashas of ghee (clarified butter), is given to the accused, which he must eat from the hand of a Brahmin. Should this produce no effect, he is absolved; if otherwise, declared to be guilty. There is a second method, viz: The poisonous hooded snake (Naga) is thrown into a deep earthen pot, into which is dropped a ring or a coin, which the accused is desired to take out. If the snake bite him, he is pronounced guilty; if not, innocent.

5th. Ordeal by Rice. A few grains of raw rice are put into the mouth of the accused; if he has sufficient moisture in his mouth to enable him to chew and swallow the rice, he is said to be innocent; if not, guilty.

6th. Ordeal by Burning Oil. The hand of the accused is thrust into hot burning oil; should his hand be burned, he is declared guilty; if not, innocent.

7th. Ordeal by Hot Iron. A red-hot piece of iron is placed in the hand of the accused; if his hand be burned, he is pronounced guilty; if not, innocent.

8th. Ordeal by Images. An image called D'Harma, or Genius of Justice, made of silver, and another called Adharma, composed of clay or iron, are both thrown into a large jar, into which the accused is desired to thrust his

place ; but she refused to open her hand to receive the iron. An administrator in the ordeal, therefore, touched the back of her hand with it, which was sorely burned, and she was pronounced guilty, and condemned to be burned alive.

The only regret the infuriated Aika experienced was the dying unrevenged upon Mirza ; and she had given up all idea of the kind, when, on her approaching the fire, she saw him amongst the crowd. She instantly made the request to be allowed to embrace her friends before she died, feeling certain Mirza would press forward with the rest ; and if not, she determined on calling him towards her. How far she succeeded I have already related, and must now proceed to mention the occurrences which took place after the fire had consumed this furious woman.

Mirza, having broken through the crowd, hastened to a small cottage without the town, where lived all he held dear in this world—his lovely Noor Mihr, a young and beautiful girl, living under the protection of a poor cultivator and his wife, under whose roof she had been placed in a most mysterious manner, nor could the cultivator ever learn to whom she belonged, or who were her natural parents. To the frequent enquiries of Mirza they could only state, that one rainy night in the Monsoon, about fourteen years back, when they resided in the forest of Tirah, a stranger tapped at their door demanding shelter ; they were about to deny

hand. If he extract the silver image, he is acquitted ; but if he draw the iron or clay one, he is decided to be guilty. There is a second method, viz. the figure of the Deity is painted on a piece of white and a piece of black cloth ; these being rolled in cow-dung, and thrown into a jar, the accused is desired to extract one ; should he unfortunately draw out the piece of black cloth, he is pronounced guilty ; but if the white, then he is acquitted.

him, but, hearing the cry of an infant, arose and opened the door. The stranger placed the infant in the woman's hands, and instantly darted away ; nor had they heard anything of him since. The forest being infested by banditti, they had been induced to change their place of residence and approach nearer to the Rosheniah chieftain, hoping to enjoy comfort and protection.

Mirza had accidentally beheld the charming girl before he entered into action with the Moghuls, where he was made captive. At that time she was too young to be sensible of his admiration ; but, on his return, he was delighted to find her grown more lovely than he could have imagined, and was also gratified by perceiving she had not forgotten him. The old cultivator and his wife with joy perceived the youth's growing attachment to their dear Noor Mihr, and anticipated much personal advantage should a union take place, Mirza standing high in favour of both Bayezid and his son Jelal. It was with alarm and anxiety, therefore, they beheld the affrighted Mirza running breathless to their cottage, where he fell upon the ground, writhing under the torture of the flames into which the revengeful Aika had precipitated him. It was long ere he could give an explanation of his distressing situation ; and when at last he attempted to depict his agony both of mind and body, the lovely eyes of Noor Mihr were bathed in tears, which ended in hysteric grief on hearing the necessity he was reduced to, to fly the country, for that his life was in danger. He endeavoured to calm the agitated girl, and made her promise to join him at Tirah, whither he intended to fly, there being in that place none of the infuriated sect of the Rosheniah. Noor Mihr promised to follow him and join him at Tirah ; and both

being now resigned to their temporary separation, Mirza prepared to depart, swearing he existed only in the hope of speedily meeting his beloved Noor Mihr at the place appointed. He was in the act of emerging from the cottage when a troop of men were seen approaching it.

‘Conceal me,’ he cried, ‘good Koombie! Protect me for Noor Mihr’s sake!’

‘Heavens!’ cried the old man, ‘what is to be done? I have no place for concealment; and if you are discovered I shall also lose my life.’

The old woman now came forward, proposing he should be deposited in a large earthen jar made to contain grain. In an instant the terrified Mirza was deposited within the jar, and soon heard the men at the door of the cottage.

‘Any runaway here, friend?’ said a rough voice to the cultivator.

‘No, brother,’ said he coolly; ‘whom seek you?’

‘Oh! the vilest villain that ever walked the earth—the ungrateful Mirza Khalil; have you not heard of his crime?’

‘No, truly,’ said the cultivator; ‘what may it be?’

‘Murder!’ said the same voice, which proceeded to relate the whole story, not without sundry embellishments and exaggerations, concluding with desiring the cultivator to keep a good look-out for the culprit, who could not have proceeded very far.

‘For my part,’ said one of the party, ‘I don’t see any use in going farther, for I know he will come hither before he leaves this part of the country. There is a loadstone here which will draw him into our clutches; so suppose we wait an hour or so. Come, my

good friend,' addressing the owner of the cottage, 'give us something to eat, will you?'

'Ay, ay,' said several voices, 'something good, old fellow; or we'll storm your granary for you.'

'Oh, indeed,' replied the terrified wife of the cultivator, 'we have nothing in the world—no bread, no rice, no vegetables, nothing at all.'

'Come, come, old woman, that won't do—what! with all those great jars in your house, tell us you have no grain? We will see.' So saying, he arose and uncovered a jar close to that which contained the unhappy Mirza. 'Ah,' said he, 'I think I perceive some rice in the very first jar I peep into.' So saying, he produced a handful of fine rice, and then emptied the contents of the jar upon the floor. 'Now for your cooking-pots, old woman,' cried the men.

The old woman, seeing there was no help, obeyed, assisted by Noor Mihr, who was most anxious to see the men depart. All the time the rice was cooking poor Mirza was very nearly cramped to death; and Noor Mihr, feeling for his situation, whispered the cultivator to make some excuse for removing the jars into the yard. His cottage being small, he apologised for want of room, saying he would remove the jars, so that his guests might be accommodated.

'That's right,' said one of the men; 'come, we will assist you.' Saying which, the fellow laid hold of the very jar which contained poor Mirza, exclaiming, 'Here is a pretty full one, however, my worthy host—no grain in your house, eh? Why, you are full of grain. I never felt so heavy a jar in my life.' Thus saying, he

rolled the jar into the yard, his companions assisting with the remaining ones.

The situation of Mirza was now so irksome, that he resolved to quit the friendly jar and trust to chance for his escape. Near him stood the dejected Noor Mihr, to whom he gave a hasty parting embrace, and, leaping over a low fence, cried 'Remember!' and was instantly out of sight. Noor Mihr once more joined the men inside the cottage, who, having eaten sufficient, were proposing to depart, when one of them observed that, 'having removed the grain, we are bound to replace it ere we quit our worthy host. Come, brothers, let us assist in replacing the jars.' The men all arose; but the cultivator assured them there was no necessity for giving themselves so much trouble, as he wished the jars to remain where they were, for the purpose of being washed before they were replenished.

'Ay, ay, my good man,' said one of the fellows; 'but one, you know, is full already, so that will not require to be either washed or replenished; besides, I and my friends intend to help ourselves to a seer¹ or two of its contents, to carry away with us.'

'Certainly,' replied another; and 'To be sure,' cried the third; 'come, let us to the yard and roll in the jars.'

'I will fetch what quantity of grain you require,' said Noor Mihr; 'pray do not trouble yourselves to roll in the jars.'

'Thanks, my pretty one,' said the foremost of the party; 'but we are accustomed to measure our own grain, and the quantity is as much as we can carry in our bellies and as much as we can

¹ A small measure.

bear on our backs.' Saying which, they went into the yard and laid hold of the jar in which Mirza had been concealed.

'Here is the heavy one, brothers,' said one man; 'come, help me with it.' So saying, he applied his shoulder to the top of the jar to tilt it on its edge, when the unexpected vast difference of its weight caused both man and jar to fall to the ground, amidst the jeers of the rest of the party.

'Ah, my fine fellow!' said the fallen man to the old cultivator, 'I see your trick: you have emptied the jar to deprive us of our grain; but, faith, you have been quick about it. Come, show us your granary; where have you put the contents of this large jar?'

The poor old cultivator, who was ignorant of the escape of Mirza, was so astonished at beholding the jar unoccupied, that his surprise equalled, if not exceeded, that of the rapacious guards; so that he could only stand and stare in the most vacant, stupid manner, without uttering a single word. His wife was also wonder-struck, and, like her spouse, stood speechless.

Noor Mihr, dreading lest the old couple, through fright, should confess the truth, said, 'Indeed, my friends, you have laboured under a mistake; this jar contained no grain, but a quantity of sand, which I have removed, as you see, and placed in that corner.'

'I see the sand,' said one of the men, 'but you must have had a laborious job, my pretty one, for the jar was very heavy.'

'True, my arms do ache,' said she; 'but I knew the cultivator was desirous of having the jars emptied, for the purpose of washing them, so I took the opportunity of your kind assistance, through which they have been brought hither, and during your meal have completed my task.'

The fellows were constrained to believe all this, and went

away dissatisfied at not getting as much grain as they could carry on their backs.

The unhappy fugitive pursued his way over barren heaths and thick jungles until night overtook him, when he ascended a tree, the best security against the attacks of both men and beasts. He had not remained in his retreat above an hour when he fancied he heard voices approaching; he listened, and felt convinced he had not been deceived; he heard the trampling of horses, and soon a party of armed men halted beneath him.

A loud voice now exclaimed, 'Rest here, brave comrades, and let me once more hear the sad tale. Bring forth the messenger of woe!'

'Tell me,' cried the person who appeared to be the chieftain of the band, 'say, is Aika indeed dead?'

'Her ashes, my lord, are now scattered before the wind.'

'And who is this Mirza, for whose sake she confessed to have murdered her husband?'

'A strange youth, my lord—a foundling; no one knows who or what he is.'

'And is he not discovered?'

'Not when I came away, my lord; but it is very probable we shall find him secured on our arrival.'

'I trust we shall; but alas! we are too late to save my wretched sister, Aika. This act cries for vengeance.'

Here the conversation became inaudible; and soon after, torches having been prepared, the party moved forward.

'Oh, remorseless woman!' cried Mirza, when the party had moved on, 'what misery hast thou heaped upon me! Who is this brother who thus meditates revenge? Alas! poor old Bayezid,

revered chieftain, I fear thy end is near at hand. Would I durst return to shield thee from the coming blow; but the dying words of Aika leave me no hope of convincing thee of my innocence.' As soon as morning dawned Mirza descended the tree, and pursued his way towards Tirah, which place he reached after two days' fatiguing journey. 'Here,' thought he, 'will I await the coming of my beloved Noor Mihr, and with her retire to some obscure corner, and by the labour of my hands support our existence. The unhappy youth waited day after day, week after week, but no Noor Mihr blessed his sight. What could be the reason of her delay? Could she be false? Impossible! the sun would as soon alter its course as she could ever forget her vow. Some danger, then, must have assailed her. I will once more in secret visit the cottage of the cultivator. My mind is ill at ease.' Mirza, having disguised himself as well as he was able, once more penetrated the jungles; but the night being unusually dark, he lost his way, and wandered he knew not whither. At last he came to a strong and gloomy-looking fort, which stood apparently in the centre of the forest. He approached the gate, determining to enquire his way, or, if invited, remain within its walls till morning dawned. He called aloud, but received no answer; he repeated his call. A voice from within cried, 'Who is there?'

'A wandering traveller who has lost his way, and begs instruction,' replied the youth.

'Wait a moment,' said the voice, 'and I will open the gate for you.'

A low wicket in an immense gate was soon heard to grate on

its hinges, and a countenance not the most prepossessing peeped out, saying, 'Come in, brother ; you will not find your way this dark night ; remain here till morning, and then we will talk about your way.'

Mirza hesitated, but at last accepted the invitation. He found himself in a spacious courtyard, around which were erected sheds of bamboo covered with leaves of the Palmyra, under which reposed half-a dozen armed men, although the place appeared capable of containing nearly five hundred. The man who had admitted Mirza pointed to a vacant mat in one corner, and desired him to rest thereon until morning.

Anxiously did the youth look for the appearance of dawn, and sleep visited him not. When the streaks of daylight gladdened his sight he arose and approached the gate, where he found the trusty porter fast asleep. He had sorely repented having entered the fortress ; and, from the appearance of the inhabitants, had a presentiment he should not be allowed quietly to depart. All being hushed in slumber, therefore, he laid his hand on the bolt of the wicket, intending to go out without troubling the sleeping porter ; but on his attempting to draw it the noise awoke the man by its side, who, starting up, exclaimed, 'Ah, my friend ; what, off without thanking us for your night's accommodation ? This is ungrateful.'

'Indeed, friend, I did not wish to disturb your slumbers,' replied Mirza ; 'but, as you are awake, pray allow me to depart.'

'Oh, then I suppose you have dreamed your right road, have you ? But I tell you what, young man : you must not go.'

'Must not go ! Who shall prevent me ?'

‘I shall prevent you, and my comrades shall prevent you.’

‘What object can you have in detaining me, a stranger to you all?’

‘Young man, know you that you are in the castle of Fusad Khan?’

‘Heavens!’ exclaimed Mirza, ‘is it possible?’

‘It is; and it is also very possible you will never get out of it again—it being one of his rules never to suffer anyone to quit these walls without a strict personal examination.’

‘I am ready,’ said Mirza.

‘That may be, young man; but our master is by no means ready, not being at present amongst us. On his return, however, you will quickly be called upon to give an account of yourself; and if satisfactory, perhaps you may be allowed to depart.’

‘When will he return, friend?’ enquired the anxious Mirza.

‘I can’t say,’ was the answer; ‘he is gone on important business. But, my friend, are you one of the Rosheniah sect?’

‘No,’ replied Mirza, ‘I am not.’

‘You detest them, then?’

‘No; I cannot say I have any enmity towards them.’

‘Will you fight against them?’

‘Not willingly; but methinks, my friend, you have, in the absence of your master, taken upon you the office of examiner.’

‘Well, suppose I have, what then?’

‘Why, then I shall decline answering your questions, that is all.’

‘Very well, my friend, just as you please. But you seem vastly proud. We shall lower you a peg, I fancy, ere we part.’

The porter now placed a lock on the gate, and desired his prisoner to keep at a proper distance from his post in future, or he might repent it. The whole of the day was passed without a single word being spoken to the distressed youth, and at night he laid down fatigued and unhappy. The guards were conversing together : he listened, and overheard the following dialogue.

‘Come, brother, let us have some good liquor ; our chief won’t be with us this night.’

‘No, no ; he has enough on his hands. I warrant he will make old Bayezid repent burning his sister.’

Mirza was now keenly alive to the horrors of his situation, and strained every nerve to listen to the conversation, which, however, was carried on in so low a tone as to baffle all attempts at learning any farther particulars. He had heard enough, however, to deprive him of all idea of sleep, and once more passed a wretched and uncomfortable night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD'S STORY (*continued*).

THE following day passed like the preceding one : not a word did the guards address to Mirza, save when they threw before him some rice at their mid-day meal. The porter, Mirza fancied, cast peculiar glances at him, full of mysterious meaning. About four days after his arrival at the fortress he was awakened one morning by the sound of an unusual number of voices, and, lifting up his eyes, perceived the courtyard filled with men, completely armed, two of whom were conveying a prisoner, bound hand and foot, into the interior of the building. 'Alas ! poor captive !' thought he, 'thou art doomed to much misery, perhaps death !' He ventured to enquire who the prisoner was.

'Ask no questions, young man,' replied a rough voice, 'but look to yourself. Fusad Khan is arrived, and ready to examine you.'

'I am prepared,' replied Mirza ; 'lead me to him.'

'No hurry, friend ; he will summon you all in good time, I warrant ye ; but, in the meanwhile, ask no questions, for you will find none here to answer them.'

On the same day Mirza was surprised on beholding the court-

yard of the fortress filled with armed men, arranged in regular order. Fusad Khan appearing, all bowed to the ground. He was an athletic, tall, and well-proportioned man, evidently inured to toil and war; a manly dignity, somewhat bordering on ferocity, however, pervaded his whole countenance, yet at a glance it could be discovered he lacked neither judgment nor understanding. He spoke well and fluently, was courteous to all around him, at the same time preserving the dignity and hauteur of a strict disciplinarian.

‘Bring forth the prisoner!’ cried the stern and hardy chieftain.

Mirza expected to have been seized, and prepared accordingly; but, perceiving the attention of the guards directed towards another quarter, called to mind the unhappy man whom he had witnessed in chains a few hours before. Convinced in his own mind the prisoner was no other than Bayezid, the Rosheniah chieftain, he was meditating how to save him from destruction (for it was evident they were busied in preparations for death), when a rustling immediately opposite him indicated the coming of the prisoner. Mirza leaned forward to catch a view of the countenance of the revered Bayezid, when, to his astonishment, he beheld features to which he was an utter stranger. The man in chains before him was young and handsome; his mild countenance bore the stamp of placid resignation to his fate, which could not fail creating a strong interest in his favour in every breast not hardened by the frequent commission of acts of bloodshed and rapine. Of all now assembled Mirza alone gazed on the captive with an eye of pity. Alas! that was all he had it in his power to bestow. Himself a prisoner, what could he do?

‘Come forth!’ exclaimed the chieftain. ‘Here must thou answer for thy crime.’

‘My lord,’ replied the youth, ‘I have no crime to answer for. You are mistaken; I am not the man you seek.’

‘Shallow subterfuge!’ cried the chieftain. ‘My information is too good to be doubted. Say, my friends, what punishment is due to him who first seduces the affections of a woman, urges her on to poison her husband, and then deserts her; and not only suffers her to be burned alive for the crime he himself prompted her to commit, but stands by to gratify his eyes with the sight? Speak, I say, all of ye: what punishment doth such a wretch deserve?’

‘Death! death! the worst of deaths!’ was echoed and re-echoed through the courtyard by the surrounding guards.

‘True, oh chieftain!’ said the prisoner. ‘I also say such a man deserves the worst of deaths; but I am not the man so accursedly guilty—I swear most solemnly I am not Mirza Khalil; and hadst thou not so suddenly conveyed me away, I would have produced testimony of the fact.’

‘What barefaced lie will not so depraved a villain utter to save his wretched life!’ observed Fusad Khan. ‘I command the prisoner to be instantly shot in my presence.’

The fatal bullets were now thrust into the matchlocks of the ever-ready followers of the chieftain. The prisoner kneeled to receive them in his breast, when Mirza, rushing through the crowd, cried, ‘Hold, chieftain! the youth has uttered no falsehood. I am Mirza Khalil. Spare him; and if it should be

impossible to convince you of my innocence, then wreak your vengeance upon me, for I am the man you seek.'

Fusad Khan was awe-struck. Something within whispered that the man who could thus boldly and honourably come forth to save a life could never have been guilty of taking one away. His sister's last words, however, rang in his ears, and he felt all the love of revenge burn within him. 'Release the prisoner, and secure Mirza,' was the order now given.

The liberated youth cast a look of gratitude, mingled with wonder, at the resigned, the noble Mirza, silently determining to strive hard to procure his pardon, or, at least, a strict investigation into the accusation against him. Mirza was ordered to be kept in close confinement until further orders; and the young man who so narrowly escaped death was suffered to remain in the fortress until the fate of Mirza should be decided.

It will now be necessary to return to the cultivator's cottage, and relate the occurrences which took place after the departure of the unhappy Mirza.

Noor Mihr, on the escape of her beloved Mirza, employed herself in preparing a suitable disguise for her journey through the jungles to Tirah, determining to set out early on the following morning. Her careful guardians, however, having also employed themselves in discussing the fallen condition of Mirza, no longer indulged in the hope of personal advantage from his union with Noor Mihr, and therefore determined to prevent her setting out to join him. Great and bitter was her disappointment and vexation, on appearing to take leave of them, to hear the old man

command her to remain quiet at home, and to forget Mirza for ever. The first she would obey, but the second command never. The image of Mirza was engrafted in her very existence—to deprive her of the remembrance of him was impossible. ‘As well,’ thought she, ‘might my guardian attempt to control the waves of the sea or the winds of heaven : my body is under their custody, but my heart is Mirza’s ; for him alone it beats.’

Thus passed many days, when one evening a young man, and one of those who had first come in search of Mirza, entered the cottage. His name, he said, was Hoossein, a young officer under Bayezid, who had, on the evening of the search after Mirza, beheld the lovely Noor Mihr, and had come to express to her in person the feelings she had inspired. Noor Mihr being present, instantly bade him give up all idea of her for ever, for that her heart was another’s.

‘Alas !’ cried the interesting Hoossein ; ‘it beats, then, for Mirza.’

‘Stranger, thou hast rightly guessed,’ exclaimed the old woman ; ‘but as he is gone, and lost for ever, let us hope.’

‘Hope nothing !’ cried Noor Mihr ; ‘for, dead or alive, absent or present, my heart is his—my thoughts are on him, and ever shall be.’

Hoossein in vain urged his passion ; in vain did the cultivator threaten, scold, and entreat—Noor Mihr was deaf to all their arguments, and callous to their anger.

Hoossein was a youth bred up from his infancy in a camp. His father had early entrusted him to the care of an experienced officer ; nor had he any recollection of his parent, save that he was harsh, morose, and apparently without any employment, yet

frequently absent for many days together. The excellent qualities of Hoossein had attracted the notice of his superiors, and he became raised to the rank of an officer, in which situation he hoped to have signalised himself ; but since he had beheld the lovely Noor Mihr his thoughts wandered from war to love ; nor could the advice of a learned Syud, with whom he was intimate, induce him to forego his visits to the cultivator's cottage.

‘Beware,’ the old instructor would say, ‘how you devote yourself to the passion of love ; remember what sayeth the poet, “Zoolf-i-Khooban zunjeer-i-paee ukl ust, waw dam-i moorghi zeruk.”’¹

Notwithstanding all the caution of the venerable Syud, Hoossein still persevered in visiting Noor Mihr, who nevertheless continued to behold him with indifference. It was at this time Fusad Khan arrived, thirsting for vengeance upon both Bayezid and Mirza ; the former, he soon understood, was too powerful for him to cope with at present. He therefore sent out his scouts to discover the latter. Seeing a young man not unlike Mirza visit the cultivator's cottage, the neighbours had determined in their own minds that it was indeed Mirza himself. When, therefore, the spies of Fusad Khan enquired all around concerning that unfortunate youth, they were informed by the mistaken people of the village of the place where they would certainly find him. The scouts returned with the news to their lord, who deputed ten men to proceed to the cultivator's cottage, with orders to seize the young man and bear him off to the jungle, whither he would quickly join them.

¹ ‘The ringlets of the fair are a chain on the foot of reason, and a snare for the bird of wisdom.’

Thus, whilst the ardent Hoossein was pouring forth his love at the feet of his mistress he perceived and felt that the Syud was right. The ringlets of the fair became a snare to the bird of wisdom, for he was surrounded and dragged from the cottage, and hurried away to the jungle; nor did he learn the cause of this sudden arrest until the following day. His surprise may be imagined. He strove by all the rhetoric he was master of to prove that he, Hoossein, could not possibly be the guilty Mirza. How far he succeeded we have already seen.

Bayezid continued his search after Mirza in vain; and on the arrival of Fusad Khan was surprised at receiving from that chieftain a message requesting an audience. The wary Bayezid, however, justly conjecturing the state of mind of Fusad Khan, and well aware of his ferocious disposition, caused the gates to be shut, and forbade all communication with his camp, not condescending even to return him an answer to his request. Fusad Khan was a considerable landholder, and a formidable warrior; and had he cause of complaint against any other person than Bayezid himself, thousands would gladly have enrolled themselves under his banners; but as it was, the lower classes of people looking upon him as a god, as an instructor, without whom they would perish, all, with a few exceptions, shrank from aiding Fusad Khan in his attempts at violence and acts of hostility towards the revered chieftain. This being the case, Fusad Khan deemed it prudent to return, satisfied with having obtained only one of his intended victims, whom he determined should suffer death before his face. Fusad Khan was revengeful, but could not be said to delight in blood; he was strict and severe on the guilty, but never wanted only

punished the innocent, although, unfortunately for the latter, owing to the great value he set upon his own judgment, they were not unfrequently confounded with the former. The bold, unaccountable manner, therefore, of Mirza struck the chieftain, and he sent for the youth to converse with him in private. Mirza related to him all the arts practised by his misguided sister, Aika ; and to convince Fusad Khan of the truth of his assertions regarding his rejection of her offers, related his firm attachment to Noor Mihr, concluding by attributing to revenge the dying words of his unhappy sister. The chieftain began to consider that the statement of the young man might be correct, but determined on keeping him a prisoner yet awhile, until he could become more fully convinced of his innocence. About two days after the above conversation an armed force was seen surrounding the fortress, and a herald, in the name of Bayezid, demanded the chieftain Fusad Khan to deliver up to him a youth named Mirza Khalil, who, it was well known, was within those walls. Fusad Khan determined to treat the messenger of Bayezid in the same contemptuous manner as his own herald had experienced from that chieftain. He therefore returned no answer, upon which the signal of attack was given, and a siege commenced which continued nearly half the day, when finally the assailants found their way into the fortress, and by their numbers overpowered the garrison. The leader of the gallant band demanded Mirza alone, pledging himself to protect every soul within the walls, were he delivered up to him. It was galling to the proud spirit of Fusad Khan to be thus compelled to surrender the youth, of whose guilt he now entertained no doubt, since Bayezid, who must know more of the

circumstances than himself, was now employed in making a vigorous search for him. True it was that Mirza would meet his punishment from the hands of Bayezid, instead of bleeding by his own order in his own castle ; and as his death was inevitable, he hesitated not in delivering him up to the herald, and gave orders accordingly. On proceeding to the dungeon of Mirza the guards were overwhelmed with dismay at perceiving it empty, and on investigation discovered that both Mirza and Hoosein had effected their escape. The herald looked as if he suspected some trick ; but Fusad Khan, to convince him to the contrary, begged he would himself ransack the place, assuring him he had no particular desire to deprive Bayezid of the honour of shooting a fellow through the head who he was on the point of immolating himself. The leader of the party and the herald of Bayezid, convinced of the sincerity of Fusad Khan, prepared, after some little investigation, to return whence they had come. Fusad Khan, as a farther proof of his ignorance of the escape of the prisoners, caused the two guards whose duty it was to have been more careful, and who had been especially appointed to guard them, to be delivered over to the herald, and sent prisoners to Bayezid to do as he liked with them. The soldiers of Bayezid were, consequently, constrained to be satisfied with the two unhappy men, instead of him they had come in quest of.

Mirza and his friend Hoossein, having been confined in the same cell, naturally expressed a desire to free themselves from the chains of Fusad Khan, and accordingly planned a method by which, with considerable risk, they might accomplish their wishes. By great good luck the door of their cell was unlocked, and in

the dead of the night they crept softly up to the ramparts, passing several of the sleeping soldiers of the garrison. Hoossein dropped down from the wall by means of a long shawl which he fastened to an old iron gun, and landed safe at the bottom. Mirza followed, but unfortunately sprained his ankle, so as to render walking impossible. Hoossein, deeply concerned at the misfortune, carried the youth on his shoulders for a considerable distance through the jungles ; and at last fatigued, deposited his burthen beneath a tree and set to work to prepare a rude litter, which, when completed, was useless without the aid of another person. In the hope of finding some one, he left his friend and struck into a narrow path on his right ; but, alas ! returned unsuccessful—not a human being could he meet with. He was therefore compelled to sit down in despair by the side of the helpless Mirza, in the centre of the jungle, where they passed the whole night. Early on the following morning came the troop of Bayezid's soldiers, escorting the two negligent guards of Fusad Khan. Perceiving two men with a litter, they halted ; and one of the guards now in custody recognized poor Mirza, and gave information accordingly. The youth was seized, and Hoossein also made prisoner, being considered an accomplice. The object of their errand having thus unexpectedly dropped into their clutches, the two substitutes were released, much to their joy ; and after making their obeisance to the leader of Bayezid's soldiers, quickly prepared to return to the fortress of Fusad Khan.

Mirza now entirely gave himself up as lost, notwithstanding the hopes held out to him by his companion Hoossein.

'Deceive me not, my friend,' he would say ; 'the enraged

Bayezid pants for some one on whom he may wreak his vengeance. I must not indulge in any hope of escaping his fury.'

'Trust me,' replied Hoossein, 'our chieftain is just, and will not turn aside his ear from truth and reason. I could give him a convincing proof of your indifference to Aika.'

'Name it,' cried Mirza.

'Your love for Noor Mihr.'

'Ah, my friend, is this so public? And still am I considered guilty of the murder of Jelal, for the sake of Aika?'

'Not so public, Mirza, as you imagine. I gained my information from the lips of the fair girl herself. Nay, be not so amazed; I will candidly confess to you all I know.' Here the compassionate Hoossein explained his unsuccessful visits to the cottage, concluding with declaring that since he perceived the love that glowed in the bosoms of both himself and Noor Mihr, he would abandon all idea of possessing the lovely girl, and do all in his power to aid and assist her and the unhappy Mirza.

'Oh, Hoossein!' cried Mirza, 'but can I expect ever again to behold my beloved?'

'Hope all things, my friend. Bayezid is merciful and just.'

In two days' time, the prisoners, having arrived at Paishawer, the city where Bayezid resided, were speedily conducted before the exasperated chieftain.

'Have I at last found thee, thou base, ungrateful, and unrelenting murderer? You, whom I have brought up; whom my dear son rescued from destruction; but who, serpent-like, hast destroyed the hand of him who cherished thee; and for which act now prepare to die.'

‘My lord,’ replied the youth, ‘I am not guilty of so foul a crime. I never even encouraged an impure thought towards my protector’s wife, although that infatuated woman considered me an easy prey to her unholy passion ; but, as I live, I endeavoured to dissuade her from indulging in her wicked desires. I urged my gratitude for her husband, and stated my obligations to him and yourself ; but I had at the same time a motive, equally strong, for rejecting her advances ; my heart had been given to another, for whom I would and will yield up my life. Not being aware of this, the infuriated woman, urged by the violence of her passion, and believing her spouse to be the only obstacle to her wishes, poisoned him unknown to me ; but could I have dreamed she could have carried her treacherous wiles so far, I would have flown to save my lord and generous protector. Revenge alone, for my neglect, induced her to plunge me into the flames prepared for herself, and my unlooked-for escape from its torments prompted her so unjustly to accuse me.’ Here ended Mirza ; and Hoossein advancing, bore witness to the love of Mirza for Noor Mihr.

Bayezid, however, sat unmoved and unconvinced, and cried aloud : ‘ Prepare to die ! thy defence, though ingenious, avails thee not.’

Mirza was led away to a gloomy dungeon, whilst Hoossein, against whom nothing could be adduced, was set at liberty.

The day was not fixed for the execution of the prisoner, and Hoossein determined to strive continually to obtain a pardon ; but, alas ! he tried in vain. All pitied, yet none could save the hapless youth. Hoossein visited his friend Mirza in his prison, who, finding all attempts to save him, all exertions of Hoossein

futile, begged that Noor Mihr might be assured his last thoughts should be hers, and on her only, and that he died breathing her name. Hoossein promised to convey his message, and for this purpose hastened to the cultivator's cottage. He soon found the old man and his wife, but on enquiring for Noor Mihr the old couple only shook their heads in a mournful manner.

'Heavens!' cried Hoossein, 'is she then dead?'

'She may be,' was the answer.

'May be! What means this ambiguity? Speak, I command ye!'

'Oh, sir!' said the old man, 'ruffians have carried her off; torn her from her home, and left us distracted.'

'Is this possible, old man? Who were the villains?'

'Some of Fusad Khan's band broke into our hut and seized the gentle Noor Mihr—farther we know not.'

'How can I bear such a tale to my distracted friend, Mirza? This will be worse than death to him.' After pondering some time on the melancholy intelligence, Hoossein rushed from the cottage and repaired to the cell of Mirza; but orders had been given to deny him admission, and he almost rejoiced at the arrangement, for he indeed knew not how to break the sad news to the unhappy victim.

The execution of Mirza was delayed by the sudden and unexpected appearance of Fusad Khan's soldiers, headed by himself. This able and independent chieftain, having had cause to be dissatisfied with Bayezid on account of the execution of his sister, had determined to overthrow Bayezid; but aware of his own impotency, despatched a messenger to the Afghans of Tirah, who

entertained a deadly hatred towards Bayezid, on account of the horrid cruelties practised by him some years previous, when he entered their province ; and on the plea of the Afghans entertaining a partiality to the ordinances of Islaam, instead of firmly embracing the doctrines of the Súfis, tied their hands behind them and put many to death. These people, therefore, were invited to join Fusad Khan. But their troops and resources at this period not enabling them to enter as they could have wished immediately into his schemes, they promised to prepare without loss of time, proposing that in the interim Fusad Khan should by plunder harass the districts around Paishawer, and thereby weaken the Rosheniahs, who would be thus compelled to surrender to their combined forces. Fusad Khan, approving of the plan, instantly left his stronghold, and with one thousand men advanced before Paishawer itself. Bayezid, however, having long anticipated considerable opposition from the ambitious Fusad Khan, in consequence of the execution of his sister Aika, had fortified his town so well that the enemy found it impossible to effect a lodgment therein, and retreated with the loss of a considerable number of men. Fusad Khan, although foiled in his rash attempt at a victory unassisted by the Afghans, made up by plunder the loss he had sustained in men, and greatly impoverished the surrounding districts. As soon as Bayezid had leisure to call to mind the unhappy Mirza, he issued orders appointing the day for his execution, determining he should be burned alive. The day arrived : the fatal fagot blazed in the market-place, before which stood the resigned Mirza. In vain he cast around his eyes to catch a last

glimpse of his beloved Noor Mihr. He enquired of his friend Hoossein if she were amongst the crowd.

‘She is not, my friend,’ he replied. ‘Think you she could survive the sight? No; she is ignorant of your fate.’

‘May she ever remain so!’ murmured Mirza. Turning to the executioners, Mirza said, ‘I am ready;’ upon which one of them began to tear off his upper garment, and Bayezid was about to give the word, when a piercing shriek from amongst the awe-struck multitude arrested his speech, and a dead silence reigned around.

‘Make way, make way!’ was now the cry; and a tall, thin, emaciated woman rushed towards the victim, whom she embraced, crying, ‘My son, my son!’ Her face was covered with her sarhec,¹ nor was she known to anyone present.

‘Who is it interrupts the execution?’ cried Bayezid.

The woman advanced towards the chieftain, and uncovered her face, saying, ‘Knowest thou not this countenance, O wicked and unjust Bayezid? Are these eyes, once thy delight, now so dim as to afford thee no recollection even of their wonted brilliancy?’

Bayezid gazed, and falling backwards, cried, ‘Fatimah!’

‘Ay, chieftain, I am that Fatimah, thy lawful wife, so unjustly accused and so cruelly disgraced by thyself; and now wouldst thou seal the catalogue of thy crimes by the murder of thine own son?’

¹ The common Hindoo garment worn by women, composed of one long piece of silk wrapped around the body, and the end hanging over the head or left shoulder.

‘What do I hear?’ cried the agitated chieftain. ‘Mirza my son? Impossible!’

‘Not so, most cruel man. I say he is thine own offspring, and I his wretched mother. Could not the remembrance of your rash and hasty admission of the crime imputed to me prompt you, in the present instance, to be more circumspect ere you heeded the accusation against this poor boy, whom you are but too ready to sacrifice on the word of a wicked woman? Oh, Bayezid! if the tenets of your sect teach not wisdom and justice, no longer call yourselves Rosheniah.’

‘Enough, Fatimah,’ cried Bayezid; ‘spare me. Release the prisoner, and lead him to my presence.’

The crowd, rejoicing in this providential escape of poor Mirza, rent the air with their shouts, and soon after dispersed. Fatimah and Mirza having been closeted with Bayezid, he was soon convinced the youth was indeed his son. And in order to render it equally clear to my noble hearers, it will be necessary to relate the substance of Fatimah’s disclosure made to the chieftain, to which he listened with awe and wonder.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD'S STORY (*continued*).

BAYEZID, whilst travelling in Afghanistan, endeavouring either by force or persuasion to convert the people of that country, saw Fatimah, the daughter of an Afghan of rank. Having succeeded in converting the father, he proposed marriage to the lovely daughter, although he had already one wife in Paishawer. The Afghan nobleman consented, but Fatimah looked forward to the union with sensations nearly amounting to horror. Accustomed, however, from her infancy to implicit obedience to her father's will, she durst not offer an objection, and the ceremony of marriage was conducted in the most pompous manner, and the bride accompanied the enraptured Bayezid to Paishawer, attended by a princely retinue. On her arrival she was introduced to Sulima, the wife of Bayezid, and mother of the murdered Jelal. Sulima was artful, insidious, and revengeful ; and, although she durst not object to this second marriage of her lord, secretly determined to mar the happiness of the innocent Fatimah. For this purpose she narrowly watched all her actions ; but so chaste and decorous was the conduct of the object of her hatred, that the wicked Sulima began to fear her schemes would miscarry.

At this period some disturbances at Tirah called for the presence of Bayezid in that quarter, and he set out, accompanied by his two wives and his only son, Jelal, then about seven years of age. Whilst Bayezid's camp remained at Tirah he had captured several Afghans, and punished many without any cause. The mild and generous disposition of Fatimah being universally known, the brother of a young captured Afghan contrived to gain access to the tents of Bayezid's wives, to solicit the kind interference of Fatimah to obtain his brother's release. Sulima beheld the youth interceding with her rival; anger, rage, and jealousy by turns took possession of her mind, and she then imagined the proper time had arrived for carrying out her nefarious plans. She therefore encouraged the visits of the young Afghan, and contrived to allow him to be as much as possible in the society of Fatimah. One evening the young man arrived at rather a late hour to hear the result of Fatimah's intercession for his brother, as she had promised not to suffer that day to pass without mentioning the captive to Bayezid. The chieftain, however, being the whole of the day occupied in affairs of consequence, she had not been able to keep her promise, and was in the act of explaining all to the young man, when Bayezid burst in upon them, and loading Fatimah with abuses, struck her to the earth, whilst the guards without seized the unfortunate Afghan and instantly severed his head from his body.

The infuriated Bayezid drove for ever from his presence the ill-fated Fatimah, who, broken-hearted and forlorn, wandered she knew not whither. Being at the time in a state of pregnancy, she could walk but a short distance, and, fatigued and exhausted, sank

to the earth. The pains of labour overtook her, and she gave birth to a boy. Unable to stir, she awaited the coming day ; and when the sun had well risen, what was her dismay at beholding a vulture in the act of seizing on the helpless babe ! She exerted all her feeble strength, waving her hand to intimidate the bird of prey, which, though it succeeded in some measure, did not prevent its ravenous beak from striking the arm of the tender infant, leaving an indelible mark thereon. Overcome by the scene and by her exertion, she fell insensible, and when recovered found herself in the hut of a Hindoo and his wife, who had discovered her in the situation above-mentioned. She called for her babe, and it was brought her, but refused to draw any sustenance from her emaciated body. After a few hours' sleep she again demanded the child ; but the Hindoo and his wife informed her that having refused the natural nourishment, they were persuaded it was possessed of a devil, meaning that it was a Bhoot Lageosa ; and that, according to their custom, they had suspended it in a basket on the first tree in the adjacent jungle.¹ The terrified Fatimah made an effort to rush to its rescue, but weakness chained her to her pallet. She then begged and entreated the cruel Hindoos to restore to her the infant ; but to no purpose ; these ignorant and superstitious people declaring their firm persuasion that the child was possessed of a devil. As soon as her strength permitted her Fatimah went in quest of her child ; but alas ! it was nowhere to be found.

¹ Bhoot Lageosa, 'A demon has seized him.' The Hindoos in some parts use this word when a child newly-born will not suck ; and they expose it to death in a basket, suspended on a tree, where it is eaten up by the ants.

It so happened that on the very day the Hindoos suspended the infant in the basket Bayezid moved his camp and halted near the jungle. Jelal, being amused with his bow and arrow, had strayed farther than usual, and approached the very tree whereon hung the basket containing Fatimah's babe. How he rescued and protected it has been already mentioned ; and I must now turn to the wretched mother, who continued to wander about forlorn and miserable. Her first journey was to Tirah, for the purpose of complaining to her father of the ill-usage of Bayezid ; but alas ! he was no more, nor had she another relation in the world. As evil always precedes good report, travelling with rapid strides from east to west, so was it in this instance. The friends of the deceased father of Fatimah scouted and scorned the unhappy woman, who, unable to bear the mortification and unmerited disgrace, left the place for ever.

She returned to the hut of the unfeeling Hindoos who had deprived her of her offspring, and on enquiry learned from them that they had heard a report that the child had been taken away by some man of consequence, who intended to bring it up with every care and attention. Fatimah marvelled greatly who the person could be that acted thus humanely, and invoked a blessing on him, although she doubted much the truth of the report, and more than once fancied the whole to be a fabrication of the Hindoos to tranquillise her agitated mind. Whither to go the helpless Fatimah knew not. At Paishawer lived Bayezid, and Tirah she was determined never again to visit. Wandering she knew not whither, and living on the charity of travellers and the cultivators in the district, she entered a wood, and sat beneath a

tree to rest her wearied limbs. She had not remained long ere she perceived a man apparently carrying a bundle, which he laid down upon the ground. He looked cautiously around, and Fatimah concealed herself behind the tree, determined to watch his motions. The cry of an infant aroused her—was it hers? She hesitated not a moment, but rushed towards the man and frantically demanded her babe. The man stared with astonishment, and pointed to the bundle, which to her surprise contained two lovely infants, which convinced her her own was not there. The man enquired the cause of her agitation ; and when he was informed of her melancholy history, which she only partly unfolded to him, he fixed his eyes earnestly upon her, and demanded whether she would consent to protect the two babes, provided she were possessed of the means of doing so. She immediately assented, and the man, raising his tender charges, bade her follow him. She obeyed, and was conducted by him to a small cottage on the skirts of the wood.

Entering and fastening the door, he said, ‘ You must consent to remain here until I shall demand the infants. Watch over and guard them. I shall visit you once in every month, and bring the necessary supplies to the cottage, providing you with money and everything requisite for the comfort and convenience of yourself ; but mark, never suffer the children to be seen, if possible. Their lives would be endangered were they known to be here secreted.’

Fatimah promised implicit obedience, and the man left the cottage, to which he returned as he had promised after one month, when he expressed himself pleased with the care Fatimah had taken of the two infants, one of which was a boy, the other a girl :

apparently twins, by the great resemblance to each other. Short, however, was the time the babes were allowed the protection of Fatimah. The man from whose hands she had received them suddenly demanded them from her, and in the middle of one dark rainy night departed, bearing them with him, leaving Fatimah forlorn and distressed ; nor had she to the present day ever set eyes on the man or the infants again. Unable to procure subsistence, Fatimah joined a set of strolling jugglers and rope-dancers, for whom she cooked and performed other menial offices, and with these people she had continued to live for many years, following them wherever they went. At last the troop came into Paishawer. Fatimah shuddered as she caught a view of Bayezid's residence, where once she had reigned mistress. She had not been long in the town when she heard the report of a young man being about to be burned alive. On enquiry she learned the youth was the adopted child of Bayezid's son, Jelal, by whom he had been brought up, having been found in a basket suspended in a tree in a forest near Tirah.

Fatimah nearly fainted on hearing this account of the youth now about to be executed, but endeavoured to compose herself, so as to avoid notice, and tried by every means in her power to gain access to the prison of the unhappy youth, but in vain. As her only chance of seeing the victim, she repaired to the market-place, where blazed the fatal fagot. From her enquiries respecting the time when the youth was discovered in the tree she sometimes felt certain he was indeed her son. Yet, when she considered how common was this practice of Bhoot Lageosa amongst the Hindoos, she dared not anticipate the pleasure of beholding

in the person of the prisoner her own child. She saw the wretched Mirza approach the blazing fire, but it was impossible to determine whether he was her son or not until the executioner bared his shoulders, when the well-known mark of the vulture's beak convinced the agonised mother her own son indeed stood before her. Her conduct has been already mentioned ; and Bayezid, having heard her sad tale, and made enquiries concerning the very spot where the child had been found, together with the testimony of the old Hindoo couple, was satisfied he had indeed found a son, and that son he was about to immolate. Fatimah had learned that Sulima was dead, having confessed to Bayezid the innocence of Fatimah. The chieftain repented, when he feared it was too late, his cruelty to poor Fatimah, and had endeavoured to discover her, but without success ; all he could now do was to atone by attention and kindness for his past unmerited injustice and cruelty.

The now truly happy Mirza, rescued from the flames, to be embraced by both a father and a mother, was appointed to the command of the division formerly held by Jelal, and by his zeal and activity promised to render his services of the highest importance. Hoossein, it may be imagined, was rejoiced beyond measure in once more embracing his friend Mirza, to whom he related the fatal occurrences at the cultivator's cottage. Mirza instantly solicited his father's permission to proceed to Fusad Khan's stronghold and claim his beloved Noor Mihr. His request was immediately complied with, the more readily as Bayezid had meditated an attack on Fusad Khan, whose negotiations with the Afghans had reached his ears, and consider-

able alarm was prevalent throughout his country. The command of the force was given to Mirza, who forgot not his friend Hoossein, whom he appointed to a senior situation, with the command of five hundred horse. The force marched towards Fusad Khan's fortress, and on the second day Hoossein was surprised at beholding, in the capacity of a common soldier, the man whom he had ever considered to be his father; and observed, moreover, that his eye was constantly directed towards himself. He took an early opportunity of addressing him, and expressed his surprise at beholding him in his present situation.

'Why art thou astonished, boy?' said the gloomy man. 'What leads thee on this expedition?'

'I go,' said Hoossein, 'to rescue injured innocence, and to subdue the enemy of my chieftain.'

'So do I,' replied the man, and then turned away, anxious to avoid further conversation.

'This is indeed strange,' thought Hoossein. 'There must be some powerful motive to draw my father from his seclusion to follow the troops to battle. I will watch him narrowly, however.'

In another day the force halted opposite Fusad Khan's fortress, and there summoned him to surrender. From a grating in an octagon turret Mirza observed a white handkerchief waving in the air, and had not a doubt but it was waved by the fair hand of his beloved Noor Mihr.

'O heaven!' exclaimed Mirza, 'what a sight! the lovely girl, imprisoned and suffering from the rebellious Fusad Khan! She sees—she recognises me!' And he returned her signal by placing his hand upon his heart.

A herald now appeared on the ramparts, demanding the cause of this summons to surrender. Mirza stepping forward, cried, 'First, in the name of Bayezid, we come to demand a lady forcibly detained here by your chieftain ; and secondly, to compel him to lay down his arms, and make compensation for his unwarrantable acts in our districts, whereby our inhabitants have been greatly harassed and their country impoverished. I give you half-an-hour to answer the summons.'

'Young man,' replied the herald, 'far less time than that will suffice ; for know that Fusad Khan has sworn to possess the girl you came in quest of, and has already made her an offer of his hand, which having been refused, he is determined to possess her on easier terms. Secondly, your chieftain murdered Fusad Khan's sister, and for this deed he will never rest until he is revenged.'

'Then prepare,' cried Mirza.

Bayezid's troops having received the signal to storm, let fly a shower of arrows on the well-manned battlements, whilst a party headed by Mirza attempted to escalate. There appeared every hope for the assailants, when a flag was held out by the besieged, which arrested their progress. A dead silence prevailed, when Fusad Khan was seen to ascend the ramparts, leading forward the captive Noor Mihr.

'Stripling,' he cried, eyeing Mirza with scorn, 'let fly another arrow, and my captive dies ; if your weapons reach not her heart, mine shall.' Saying which he drew his sword and flourished it over his captive's head. This horrid determination perplexed the arduous youth, and he knew not how to proceed. If he gave

orders to continue the siege all he held dear on earth would be exposed to the deadly arrows of his soldiers; and should she escape these, a fiend was ready to plunge his sword in her bosom.

In this dilemma the mysterious father of Hoossein, advancing, exclaimed, 'What wouldst thou, chieftain, with the maiden?'

'I would take her for my wife.'

'Thou canst not,' replied the man.

'Indeed!' replied Fusad Khan, contemptuously. 'This day will decide the point.'

'This moment, chieftain, will decide it. I repeat, thou canst not.'

'Why?'

'Because she is thy daughter.'

'Ha, ha! thinkest thou thus to turn me from my purpose? I have no daughter, idiot.'

'I say 'tis false: thou hast both a daughter and a son; and both are near thee at this moment. Remember Puroeen—the injured Puroeen.'¹

'Ha!' cried the now alarmed Fusad Khan; 'and who art thou?'

'One whose dagger hath before now been near thy heart. Hast thou forgotten Sadik, the faithful servant of Ibrahim Khan? If so, behold him now; and, I say, the fair one by thy side is thine own offspring; and not far off is her brother. Hoossein, come forth! behold thy father and thy sister!'

¹ A name given to females, especially where signs of beauty appear. Puroeen means the Pleiades, considered by Asiatics a most beautiful constellation.

Noor Mihr uttered an exclamation of surprise, and sank at the feet of the chieftain, who, after some time spent in deep meditation, consented to admit the mysterious stranger, together with Mirza and Hoossein ; and if the former could satisfactorily explain the truth of his assertions, promised to surrender the lady or to allow her to act as she pleased ; and should he not be convinced, he bound himself to allow them to depart, and recommence the siege, should they be so disposed.

Mirza, having assented to the proposition, in company with Hoossein and the mysterious stranger entered the garrison, and were introduced into a small apartment, where they were soon joined by Fusad Khan and the fair Noor Mihr.

To enable my hearers to comprehend the elucidation of the mysterious assertions of Sadik, the supposed father of Hoossein, it will be necessary to relate occurrences which took place before Fusad Khan had attained his present consequence.

Fusad Khan was by birth an Afghan, and, bred up in a camp, was from his infancy a soldier. His father was possessed of considerable property on the borders of Cabul ; and on his decease the young heir hastened to take possession of the estate. Having paid the last tribute to an affectionate parent, and erected a splendid tomb over his remains, he considered there was now nothing necessary to be done but to enjoy himself by indulging in every species of libertinism. He visited Ibrahim Khan, an Afghan of rank, but slender fortune.

He had a lovely daughter, named Puroeen, his only comfort, his only tie on earth. Fusad Khan beheld the maiden, and at a single glance became enamoured. She, alas ! also beheld him with

a favourable eye, and to her joy, after a short time he declared his love, and had the felicity to hear from her own lips how reciprocal was their attachment. He talked of marriage ; she was delighted, urging him to demand her from her father. The deceiver promised to do so, but from time to time delayed the application, until at length he triumphed over her weakness, and cruelly deserted her. The helpless Puroecn pined and fell sick. Her doating father, ignorant of the cause, hung over her couch in an agony of despair, urging her to confide her sorrows in his breast ; but she durst not disclose to him the fatal truth, answering his interrogations with floods of tears. The honour of his race had for ages passed unsullied : she feared therefore he would not survive the disgrace she had brought upon him, and delayed the dreadful disclosure, until her situation prevented the possibility of her concealing the truth from his penetrating and watchful eye. She summoned Sadik, the faithful friend and attendant of her father, to whom, after many tears and hysteric sobs, she revealed the cause of her grief. Sadik was mute with astonishment, and he left the helpless girl, saying, ‘ Lady, you shall have justice.’

He immediately proceeded to his patron, Ibrahim Khan, and in the most cautious manner stated the disgrace heaped upon him by the villain Fusad Khan. The proud and haughty Afghan stood a very statue of despair, and at last, covering his face with his hands, burst into a flood of tears, crying, ‘ Oh ! unhappy daughter of a miserable father, we are lost for ever !’

‘ Not so, noble sire ; we will compel the haughty Fusad Khan to do us justice. It is not yet too late—he must and shall wed your daughter, or his blood shall answer for his crime.’

It was then settled that Fusad Khan should be seized, and by threats compelled to marry the unhappy Puroeen. Many days elapsed ere an opportunity presented itself. At length Sadik, having thoroughly studied the disposition of Fusad Khan, caused a messenger to go to him, inviting him to visit a cottage, wherein dwelt a lovely female, whom he could obtain on no very difficult terms. The ever-ready Fusad Khan, entirely unsuspecting, attended to the hint of the messenger, and at the hour of midnight entered the cottage, where, to his surprise, he was surrounded by armed men, at the head of whom stood Sadik, whom he well knew was the bosom friend of Ibrahim. He now felt convinced of his dangerous situation, and resigned himself to his fate. His arms being bound, he was conducted, or rather dragged, to the residence of the enraged Ibrahim Khan, where stood the trembling victim of his lust.

‘ Here,’ cried Sadik, ‘ here is the lovely girl, though probably not her whom you expected to meet, and here stands her indignant father.’

‘ Yes, villain !’ cried Ibrahim ; ‘ here am I ready to give you your choice. Wed the female before you, or prepare to die.’

Fusad Khan at first swore he would suffer death rather than wed the hapless Puroeen, upon which Sadik drew his dagger and held its point to his breast. The affrighted Fusad Khan, now convinced their threats were not vain words alone, consented to wed the daughter of Ibrahim Khan ; and a Moolah being already prepared, the ceremony took place in form. The wedded pair left the house, and on its threshold Fusad Khan, having cursed his miserable bride, spurned her from him, bidding her dread his fury

if she ever again approached him. Under these circumstances Puroeen was obliged to take shelter under the roof of her afflicted parent, where, in a short time, she was delivered of twins, who were as soon as possible conveyed away to a peasant's cottage, where they were taken care of under the vigilant and watchful eye of Sadik. One evening, as he was proceeding to visit his tender charges, he perceived a strange man lurking about the cottage; he had no doubt but he was an agent of Fusad Khan's, who came with no good intent. He enquired of the peasant whether any stranger had been to them regarding the children, and was answered in the negative. He cautioned the peasant and his wife to deliver the babes to no one but himself; and they promising obedience, he left the cottage and returned to the disconsolate Ibrahim Khan, who brooded over his disgrace until his health and spirits became impaired, and he seemed fast sinking into the grave. On this evening he was unusually sad and melancholy, appearing anxious to converse with Sadik on the subject nearest his heart. Sadik in vain offered the balm of consolation; the old man only shook his head and wept; and then suddenly, as if roused by the recollection of the indignities heaped upon him, he cried, 'Sadik, the babes must die!'

'Die! my lord?'

'I have said it. I would wipe away the living evidences of my disgrace. Swear therefore, Sadik, to remove them for ever.'

The obedient Sadik swore to execute what his soul shrank from; yet he feared, if he refused, others less scrupulous would readily be found to perpetrate the deed. The time being fixed, he hastened to the cottage, not to slay, but to save. To his

astonishment the house was uninhabited; and turning hastily away, he descried a man in a narrow lane carrying a bundle in his arms. With the speed of a courser he rushed towards the man; and hearing the feeble cry of an infant, instantly drew his dagger and commanded the villain to surrender his charges. The man being unprepared, reluctantly dropped the two infants; and as Sadik was in the act of raising them the fellow drew a small dirk, and rushing on the humane Sadik, slightly wounded him. Sadik, infuriated at this conduct, returned the blow and levelled his antagonist with the dust. Not waiting to ascertain whether the man was dead, he took up his tender charges and entered the forest, where he deposited them under a tree, uncertain how to protect them, when he was surprised by hearing the shriek of a female, who was no other than poor Fatimah, who soon appeared, and, as has been related, followed the good Sadik to a cottage which he knew to be uninhabited, where she resided for some months, paying every attention to the infants under her care.

Sadik, ever on the watch after he had returned to Ibrahim Khan and reported the death of the children, kept his eye on the agents of Fusad Khan; and, from some information he received, felt convinced the retreat of Fatimah and the babes was known to that relentless man. He hastened, therefore, one night at the commencement of the rainy season and demanded Fatimah to resign the infants to him. Reluctantly did she obey; and Sadik, uttering a farewell, proceeded up the hills till he arrived at the cultivator's cottage in the environs of Paishawer. Here the idea struck him to leave one of the babes, as by a temporary separation Fusad Khan's agents might the easier be baffled in their attempts to discover his

helpless offspring. He knocked at the door, which being opened by the cultivator's wife, Sadik placed the female infant in her arms, and rushed from her presence; and the amazed tenants of the cot had never, to their knowledge, seen Sadik again. With the boy the guardian Sadik entered Paishawer, where he engaged an obscure lodging in the house of a cotton-cleaner and his wife. Finding they were quiet people, he, after remaining a few days, returned to Ibrahim Khan, leaving the boy under their protection. Ibrahim Khan he found giving orders for the funeral of his unhappy daughter Puroeen, whom sickness and mental agony had brought to the grave. Ibrahim Khan seemed rather to rejoice at the untimely decease of his once favourite child, and his spirits and health appeared to be invigorated rather than impaired by the melancholy event. Sadik now spent his time between attendance on his patron and attention to the young Hoossein, whom he had so named on account of his great beauty, and his equally beautiful sister, at the cultivator's cottage, over whom he kept a secret but watchful eye.

Nothing of importance occurred till the children advanced to an age when, according to the usages of the country, they were both marriageable. He had correct information of the visits of Mirza to the lovely Noor Mihr; and having a high regard for the youth, attempted not to thwart his wishes. The extraordinary accusation, however, against the young man somewhat staggered him; and it was with pain he perceived Noor Mihr's passion for him was not a whit abated in consequence of it. But what grieved him most was the knowledge that Hoossein had also found his way to the cottage, and was actually making love to his own

sister. He it was, therefore, who begged the Syud, the constant preceptor of Hoossein, to endeavour to dissuade him from involving himself too closely with the ringlets of the fair, which might prove a snare to the bird of wisdom.

The absence of Hoossein greatly alarmed Sadik, who made strict enquiry concerning it, and soon discovered he had been seized by mistake by the emissaries of Fusad Khan, and thus, after all his caution, fallen at last into the hands of his unnatural parent, who, under the firm persuasion of his being Mirza, would doubtless sacrifice him to his fury. After turning in his mind the most likely way to effect his delivery, he spread the report that Mirza was actually in the possession of Fusad Khan, upon which Bayezid sent a force to demand him. Sadik thus hoped, when the youth should be given up and the mistake made manifest, Hoossein would be released. Little did this careful guardian imagine that the real Mirza was at this very time in reality detained in the fortress of Fusad Khan, or that his zeal for the safety of Hoossein would be the means of apprehending Mirza, whom he heartily wished might have effectually escaped. If it was with pleasure, therefore, he received Hoossein on his return from the fortress, it was with no inconsiderable pain he beheld the trembling Mirza accompany him. Sadik, as well as Hoossein, strained every nerve to save Mirza, but in vain, and both attended in the market-place to witness his execution, which nothing but the mysterious interference of the woman could have prevented. Urged by curiosity to gain a view of the features of the singular being who had thus preserved poor Mirza, Sadik continued to place himself opposite to her, when she unveiled herself before

Bayezid : when what was his surprise at recognising the woman to whose care he had formerly entrusted the children of Fusad Khan ! He refrained from bringing himself to her notice for the present, anxiously, however, looking forward to the time when he should be able to develop the mystery in which those children were enveloped.

Sadik having seen Mirza liberated, once more returned to the mansion of Ibrahim Khan ; but, alas ! great was his grief to hear his noble patron had breathed his last but two days previously. Having died suddenly, he censured himself severely for delaying his visit, as it had ever been his intention to have undeceived him with respect to the fate of his grandchildren, and endeavour to have effected a reconciliation ; death, however, disappointing him in his good intentions, he returned to Paishawer, where preparation he found was making to march against Fusad Khan, who, it should have been mentioned, had long ago quitted the country wherein was his estate, and partially embraced the Rosheniah tenets. Seeing Hoossein armed for battle, Sadik determined on accompanying the troop, in the hope he might spare the youth from the sword of Fusad Khan, and also save that chieftain from the sin of slaying his own child ; added to which he learned with dismay that the lovely Noor Mihr had also become the captive of her relentless father. When the maiden was, therefore, brought upon the ramparts, he conceived it to be the proper time to inform Fusad Khan of the relationship between them. Sadik having from their infancy to the present moment watched over and guarded Hoossein and his sister, Fusad Khan could not admit of a doubt as to the truth of all he had heard ; and pleased

with the warlike appearance of the one, and the beauty of the other, felt a pride in being the father of them; and embracing them both, gave into the hand of Mirza that of the lovely Noor Mihr, declaring this to be the happiest moment of his life.

‘Chieftain,’ cried Sadik, ‘there is yet one point on which you are ignorant: the youth to whom thou hast given thy daughter is the son of thine enemy, Bayezid, but henceforth, let us hope, thy firmest friend; haste, therefore, to accompany us back, not a prisoner, but an ally and friend of Bayezid, who having comprehended the extraordinary events this day disclosed, will receive you with open arms!’

Fusad Khan was indeed unprepared for this latter piece of intelligence; but, considering how little he would be likely to gain by maintaining hostility towards Bayezid, exclaimed, ‘Be it so, Sadik—I follow; and may we be received as friends, and all former animosities forgiven and forgotten.’

The chieftain then set out, accompanied by his son and daughter, and the truly happy Mirza, Sadik, and Hoossein, attended by a numerous suite, and in due time reached Paishawer, where Mirza undertook to explain to Bayezid the result of the expedition. To Bayezid, who had anticipated a bloody battle, little dreaming of any connection with the family of his enemy, this intelligence was indeed surprising; and it was with pleasure he received with open arms the powerful Fusad Khan, and gave his blessing to Mirza and the lovely Noor Mihr. Fatimah also partook of the felicity experienced by the families, and was astonished on discovering Sadik to be the man whom she had met in the forest many years back, the protector of the babes of Fusad Khan;

and that her son, Mirza, should now be about to espouse the girl whom she had nurtured. It is needless to add, that Fusad Khan, in consequence of the alliance with Bayezid, refused the aid of the Afghans, and declared himself the firm friend of old Bayezid.

The nuptials of Mirza and Noor Mihr were celebrated with all the pomp and splendour due to their station, and the city of Paishawer never witnessed a happier day. Bayezid lived happy for many years in the society of his wife Fatimah. He lived to be very old, and during his lifetime the sect over whom he ruled flourished; but afterwards, historians relate that the tribe dispersed, and that to this day many of its adherents are to be found in the wildest and most inaccessible districts of Afghanistan and in Cabul, but are more numerous amongst the tribes of the Yusufzei; but that in such abhorrence are the sect held by the Mahommedans, that the few who are left in Paishawer are obliged to meet in secret at an ancient edifice, with a dome, said to be the place where Bayezid himself resided; and that at this building the pious Moslems as they pass cast stones, in token of their abhorrence of the founder of so abominable a sect.

Thus ended the tale related by the Captain of the Guard, who, bowing, retired; and the party proceeded as before to the palace of the Deewan to determine who should relate a story on the following day. The lot fell upon Katil-bhae, the butcher, who was ordered to appear at the usual hour.

The Nuwab and his ladies having assembled, the butcher was led before his highness; and having made his obeisance, commenced the tale contained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BUTCHER'S STORY.

It is well known to your Highness that the City of Ahmedabad, in the reign of Shah Jehan, the True Star of the Faith, was the most flourishing city in the world, and that, on account of the salubrity of its situation, that illustrious monarch often honoured it by a long residence therein. It was about a year after his accession to the throne, which was in the Hegira 1037,¹ that he first visited this noble city, striving all in his power to improve its wealth and commerce ; he also established a school for the education of youth, and granted land for the maintenance of the only one resorted to by many of the sons of the merchants and inhabitants. This royal gift was considered an act of unparalleled liberality, indicative of the great interest the sovereign took in the welfare of his subjects. Amongst those who extolled the gracious monarch none were so loud in their praises as Adeeb Khan, the school-master himself, who, in place of his former uncertain means of subsistence, now found himself enjoying a sure and permanent salary from the government, arising from the lands devoted to the public seminary.

Amongst the youths who attended the school of Adeeb Khan

¹ A.D. 1628.

was one named Ashuk, whose mother had taken advantage of the munificence of the Emperor, and was anxious to bestow on her son an education befitting a merchant. The father of Ashuk had been some few years numbered with the dead. During his lifetime he had filled the situation of Chief Huntsman to the Nuwab; he was also a Pylewan, or wrestler, and an expert gladiator; but his skill in hawking was such as not to be equalled by anyone far or near. The Nuwab, being passionately fond of field sports, was deeply concerned at the death of his favourite huntsman, in consideration of whose long and faithful services he granted his widow, Beewah, a small pension, which, at the present time, she continued to enjoy; but being insufficient to maintain the mode of living she had been accustomed to in her husband's lifetime, she was frequently obliged to apply to the usurious money-lenders and merchants of the city for assistance. Ashuk, her son, had early evinced a quickness of comprehension which she hoped, aided by a little useful education, would enable her to place him under the care of his uncle at Cambay, for the purpose of bringing him up as a merchant. Being an old inhabitant, and well known at court, she found no difficulty in getting the boy admitted to the school, and accordingly led him, at the age of nine years, to the seminary of Adeeb Khan.

The school, which was held in the wide verandah of the preceptor's house, was well filled with boys, whose loud and boisterous repetition of sentences, given out by the master, almost stunned the mother of Ashuk. At the upper end of the verandah, on the ground covered with a square mat, squatted Adeeb Khan, wearing a small keemcab skullcap, with his coat open in front and

trousers not over-clean, holding in his hand a rattan, without which, I believe, no school was ever known to flourish.

The heat of the day, together with the assembly of little urchins around their teacher, apparently much oppressed the indefatigable man, who from time to time fanned himself with the leaves of a book, repeatedly applying the tail of his coat to his perspiring brow. Perceiving a woman leading a boy neatly dressed into the school, he cried aloud, 'Khāmoosh !'¹ and not a whisper was heard, all eyes being turned towards Ashuk and his mother. The widow advanced towards the busy schoolmaster and presented to him her son, together with a paper, received by her from the Nuwab's Khuzanche.² Adeeb Khan, having perused the paper, expressed his readiness to admit the young Ashuk ; and understanding from Beewah figures were chiefly to be attended to, as the boy was to be a merchant, promised to do all in his power to make him a skilful accountant, commending the prudence of Beewah, saying the mercantile, of all professions, was now-a-days the most lucrative.

Beewah, having thus entered her son into the school, presented the master with a small tray of fruit and a few rupees, with a bunch of flowers, with which Adeeb Khan was much pleased, and in return, patted young Ashuk on the back, declaring he had never beheld so fine a youth, and foretold he would soon become a man of consequence, for in his sparkling eye he could discern great talent and persevering application. How far the learned preceptor was correct will presently be seen. The happy mother, making a salaam to the master, returned home, leaving her son

¹ Silence.

² Treasurer.

Ashuk to become acquainted with his schoolfellows, and to commence his studies.

The boys were divided into classes according to their ages, and no distinction was made between the children of the rich or poor. The education of boys being nearly concluded at the age of thirteen, there were but few of that age in the school, but a great number of the same standing as young Ashuk. Adeeb Khan soon discovered how erroneous was his prophecy respecting his new pupil ; for, although Ashuk possessed great talent and surprising acuteness, joined to a daring and undaunted bravery, yet, alas ! application formed not one of his virtues. He was incorrigibly idle and inattentive, minding neither the anger of his master nor the persuasions of his mother. In short, the boy detested the idea of becoming a plodding, close, calculating merchant ; and, what was very natural, panted after the delights of the chase and the use of the spear, bow, and arrow. So much did the idea of these weapons possess his youthful mind, that, when writing the letter Alif, he pictured to himself an arrow, which it may be said to resemble ; and when scrawling Bé, a bow would enter his imagination. If any exploit was in agitation, the boys all flocked to Ashuk for his advice, begging him to be their leader.

A thousand tricks were played the poor schoolmaster, all of which were invented by Ashuk. They would gum together the leaves of his Koran, spill water in his turban, which frequently, on account of the heat, he would divest himself of, or split his cane if he chanced to turn away for a moment. Ashuk would seldom have been found out in his tricks but for a boy in his class named

Ajeez, the son of a wealthy merchant named Saruk. This boy was in every respect different from Ashuk, being stupid, mean, cowardly, and ill-natured, but, at the same time, attentive and plodding in his exercises, and obsequious towards his master, whose favour he studied by every possible means to obtain. This boy added to his other qualities that of a tell-tale ; and thus was Ashuk often detected, when, but for him, discovery would have been impossible.

It may be imagined Ajeez was no great favourite in the class to which he belonged ; and many were the plans laid to punish the young tell-tale, but all without success, Ajeez being seldom or ever seen except at school or in his father's house. Ashuk remained at the school, notwithstanding all his wild behaviour, for four years ; and idle as he was, from the attention and excellent method of teaching practised by Adeeb Khan, he was considerably improved in writing and casting up accounts. If he failed in any one branch of his studies, it was in rehearsing long sentences of the Koran, which much vexed the zealous schoolmaster. Adeeb Khan seldom or ever indulged the boys with a holiday, but an event happened which induced him to allow his pupils two days' recreation. This event was the marriage of his only daughter to a captain of a merchant-vessel, then at Cambay, whose name was Fureeb Khash. The wedding accordingly took place, and the boys obtained their holiday. On returning to their studies, however, they were all more than usually idle ; so much so, that Adeeb Khan was under the necessity of using his rattan to some, set tasks to others, and keep them all in school until long after sunset, without allowing anyone to go home to dinner. Ashuk

and several of his companions, considering themselves much aggrieved, determined on playing the master a trick which would make him remember his severity for some time to come.

They therefore met one morning in the street, an hour before sunrise, and proceeded to the verandah of the master's house, where the school was held; and on the spot where Adeeb spread his mat dug a large square hole, which they filled with water; which being done, they covered it over with split pieces of cane and straw, spreading over the whole a thin covering of earth mixed with cow-dung, to appear like the other parts of the verandah, and then retired, taking care to be that day early at school to witness the expected sport. It was Adeeb's custom to commence the labours of the day soon after sunrise, when he emerged from the interior of his house, bearing his square piece of mat, which he gave into the hands of one of his scholars, if any one were present, for the purpose of spreading over his seat at the upper end of the verandah. This morning he appeared as usual, and gave his mat into the hands of Ashuk, who spread it directly over the fatal spot with unusual neatness and exactitude. Adeeb, having his Koran in one hand, and his rattan in the other, walked to and fro in the verandah until the boys assembled; when all being seated, he read, standing up, several verses from the holy book, which the boys repeated after him; he then prepared to take his seat on his mat, when, as was expected, he sank into the pit prepared for him, to the great diversion of those who were concerned in the plot, and the no small surprise of those who were not. The angry master, having still the hand at liberty which grasped the rattan, suffered the weight of it to fall on those

nearest to him, amongst which was Ajeez, the merchant's son, on whose face fell such a stroke as made him roar with pain. On beholding this unlooked-for success in their plot, Ashuk and his companions laughed most heartily. Ajeez, knowing himself to be entirely innocent, was astonished at the conduct of Adeeb Khan; and smarting under the cruel stroke of the cane, rushed from the school to complain to his powerful father, Saruk. Adeeb Khan, having contrived to extricate himself and change his clothes, blustered about in a tremendous passion, attempting to discover the guilty persons. Some among the urchins who had little regard to truth laid all the blame upon Ajeez, hoping on his return to see him severely chastised. The rage of the unhappy preceptor having somewhat subsided, he proceeded with the duties of his school, in which, however, he had not proceeded far when Saruk, the father of Ajeez, was seen coming along the street at a rapid pace, rage and indignation painted on his countenance.

Arrived at the verandah, where sat poor Adeeb Khan, the infuriated merchant seized him by the beard, and would have proceeded to further violence, had not Ashuk and his friends started up in defence of their master, whom they would not submit to see insulted in his own school; not that they minded plaguing him themselves, but an attack from a man not warranted to interfere or interfere in either way they were determined not to allow. Ashuk was the first to spring upon the merchant, who, unprepared for such a manoeuvre, fell, with Ashuk upon him, into the street; the rest of the boys following, swarmed like bees around the indignant Saruk. These imps so scratched, pinched, and beat the merchant, that he writhed with pain; they then pulled off his fine gold-

bordered turban and threw it into the frying-pan of a kabob shop opposite, which chanced to be performing its duty over a brisk fire. Not content with this, they rent his coat off his back, rubbed his mouth in the dirt, kicked and spat at him, and thus sent him home. The schoolmaster all this time had tried all in his power to check the confusion and turmoil; and, aware of the rank, wealth, and consequence of Saruk, would rather have been beaten himself than be supposed to have countenanced so serious an assault; he failed not therefore to appear very angry with Ashuk, though in reality he was greatly pleased with the zeal and courage he had evinced in his cause. Saruk, on his return home, mortified and dejected, was met by his wife, who having heard of the insults heaped upon her spouse, recommended him to apply to the Cotwall. But Saruk, being well aware he could obtain no satisfaction for the acts of a few schoolboys, refused to follow the advice, meditating, however, an act by which he would be amply revenged on Ashuk, the ringleader in the affray.

In the evening of this memorable day, Beewah, the mother of Ashuk, who had heard of the business, and severely reproved her son for the active part he had taken, was served with a summons to appear before the judge, to pay a debt due by her to the merchant Saruk. Now it was that Ashuk indeed repented his imprudence. He saw his mother bathed in tears, and was sorely grieved at the trouble he had brought upon her. There was no help, the order must be attended to, and the poor woman, followed by her son, appeared at the Judgment-hall, admitted the debt, and was ordered to pay it instantly, her creditor not allowing any delay. After many prayers and entreaties, she at last obtained a

week's time to collect the money, which was one hundred rupees, including interest. The week had nearly expired without the poor widow having gained a single rupee towards payment of the debt. The Nuwab's treasurer refused to advance a single pice of her pension, and no friend was at hand to relieve her. She thought of her brother-in-law at Cambay ; but there was no time to send to him, and a prison seemed inevitable.

There lived in the city an old miser, named Hurrees Al-Alghar, who, from his keeping no account, and always insisting on ready money, was commonly called Nugdee Hurrees.¹ To this man the father of Ashuk had occasionally sent presents, and was considered to be more acquainted with him than most of the inhabitants ; and Ashuk, as a last resource, proposed to his distressed mother an application to him.

'Son,' cried Beewah, 'as well might we attempt to wring money from the stones ; however, come with me, and by our united prayers he may for once be moved by compassion for the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. With a very faint hope of success, followed by Ashuk, she proceeded to the habitation of old Nugdee Hurrees. The miser to whom the unfortunate widow was about to apply was a Mahommedan, advanced in years, of such penurious habits that it was the wonder of the inhabitants how he contrived to keep life and soul together ; and much more so, how he managed to keep alive his only daughter, who resided with him.

Nugdee Hurrees had risen from nothing to wealth and consequence. There were many who remembered to have seen him clothed in rags, scraping up dirt and ashes, and ransacking the

¹ Ready Money.

streets, in the hopes of finding a stray copper pice or bit of silver; and how he succeeded in accumulating such vast sums as he was now reported to be possessed of, was the astonishment of the whole city; but it was generally believed he had discovered some hidden treasure, which, employing in trade, had swollen to its present unaccountable size. At the present period he resided in the heart of the city, in a strong and well-built house, three sides of which looked into a courtyard surrounded by a high wall, whilst the fourth, which had but one window, looked into a back lane. Both house and wall were built of hewn granite, so that thieves might not break in and steal his beloved gold, said to be therein stored. So cautious was the old fellow, that he would have no servant or attendant of any kind; he and his daughter alone resided within the gloomy walls of his abode. His daughter was a young girl about fourteen years of age, having no one pleasure on earth, never being allowed to go out to see, or to be seen, on any occasion whatever.

To this abode of misery did the widow and her son, Ashuk, repair, and many a knock did they give at the outer gate ere they were admitted by old Nugdee himself, who always acted as porter. On the right of the gate, inside the courtyard, was a rude bamboo shed, an apology for a chow-key, or guard-room, which served as his office, or place wherein he transacted money matters. No one had ever been known to have been admitted into the interior of his dwelling-house.

‘Sit down, good woman, sit down,’ said the miser, not offering a mat, which was a luxury he allowed only to shroffs¹ and

¹ Money-changers.

merchants of consequence. Seeing Beewah hesitate, he guessed at her wishes, and said, 'Doubtless you look for something to sit upon ; but, my good woman, a mat is a mat now-a-days, and I confess to you I cannot afford to spread it on all occasions ; but if you object to sit on the bare ground, make your son take off his coat and sit on that.'

'Then truly, Nugdee,' interrupted poor Beewah, 'coats are coats now-a-days, as you observe of mats ; and I can, God knows, little afford to turn them into cushions.'

'Well, then, neighbour, there is only one remedy ; you must stand. So now let me hear your business.' Saying which he screwed up his little eyes, pulled out a bit of dirty paper, and seemed more intent on his own affairs than on hers. Ashuk could scarcely refrain from laughter at beholding the thin, withered object before him ; whilst his mother, with a heavy heart, began to state her difficulties. When she had concluded the miser appeared absorbed in thought, hastily adding up some figures on the paper before him, without answering the widow, who continued :

'I am sure if you knew how much I stand in need of your kind assistance, you would not refuse it me.'

'The speculation won't answer,' mumbled the old fellow, regardless of the imploring object before him. 'No, no ; I know very well what piece-goods and cornelians fetch in Bengal.'

'Master Nugdee,' said the widow, 'I come not about piece-goods and cornelians.'

'What, woman ! Have you got any cornelians ? Let me see them. I will be a purchaser, provided I can get them cheap.'

‘No, truly,’ replied Beewah; ‘I have no such things about me; I am come to beg you will lend me one hundred rupees.’

‘What, what? Allah, protect me! say it again! I like to hear so vast a sum mentioned; the sound does me good.’

‘I require one hundred rupees,’ repeated Beewah.

‘Why, you do not say so!’ cried the miser. ‘Now what could possess you to think of coming to me for this enormous sum?’

‘Because I know, good sir, it will be no inconvenience to you to lend me the money.’

‘No inconvenience, say you!—pray what security am I to expect?’

‘As to that, sir, I have a pension from government, from which I will repay you; and I am ready to pass my bond for the sum.’

‘No, no, my good woman, it won’t do; I am not to be taken in thus.’

‘Nay, Master Nugdee, don’t be hard-hearted. I shall go to gaol if I don’t get the money by to-morrow.’

‘Ay, so shall I if I lend it to you; can’t do it. Go home; it won’t do.’

At this moment a voice from without the gate cried, ‘Tēl, tēl!’¹

‘Ah! there comes another fellow to add to my ruin.’ He was about to send him away, when his daughter Kheir Neyut came from the house, saying, ‘Father, there is the oilman; we want a fresh supply.’

‘Oil again! Why, had you not three pice-worth yesterday?’

¹ Oil.

‘Yes, father, but it is consumed.’

‘Consumed! how?’

‘I was unwell last night, and kept my lamp burning.’

‘Was there ever such waste and extravagance! burned a light because you were sick! Could not you be ill in the dark? However,’ said he, ‘buy as much as one pice will fetch, and mind and don’t waste it.’ Saying which he reluctantly pulled from his girdle a small bag, from which he extracted the money, which, having twirled about between his thumb and finger for at least a minute, he gave to his very extravagant child, repeating his admonition of caution and frugality.

All the time Ashuk had an opportunity of beholding the fair Kheir Neyut, who also gazed on Ashuk. Ashamed of her father’s avarice, the lovely girl blushed and cast down her eyes, whilst Ashuk was alone checked from laughing outright at the miser by perceiving the concern depicted on the maiden’s face. When she had purchased the oil she returned and showed the drop to her father, who remarked ‘with care it would last out the morrow.’ Beewah now fell at his feet, begging him to assist her in her distress. But the old fellow seemed little inclined to heed her, till Kheir Neyut ventured to intercede for the poor woman, which she did in so pleasing and respectful a manner as to cause the obstinate muscles of old Nugdee’s face to relax a little, and he said, ‘Well, for this once I will see what can be done, daughter. Fetch pen, ink, and——’ Here he checked himself, and turning to Beewah, said, ‘You must provide the paper; send your son to the bazaar.’

Ashuk was accordingly dispatched to procure this necessary

article towards concluding the business ; and as Kheir Neyut opened the gate for him he took the opportunity of thanking her for her kind intercession, which act, he said, could never be erased from his heart. The lovely girl replied that the success of her application was a sufficient reward to her, and bade him hasten back with the paper before her father should change his mind. He quickly procured the paper, and on his return found his poor mother still standing under the shed, which the sun had now entered with blazing fierceness.

‘ Now, then,’ cried the miser, who was crouched up in one corner of the shed, ‘ bring the paper ; I will frame the bond, and you shall sign it. The money required is one hundred rupees : now, I must have your bond for one hundred and fifty, to run at the rate of ten per cent.’

‘ Oh, Master Nugdee ! ’ cried the widow, ‘ this is indeed unexpected.’

‘ Oh, very well,’ said he ; ‘ if you don’t like my way of doing business, you may take your departure.’

This demand from a Mahommedan, who, by his religion, is prohibited from lending money at all on interest, was an arrangement for which Beewah was entirely unprepared ; but aware that the Hindú merchants would be just as hard upon her, and probably would not lend her a rupee on any terms, she was compelled to consent to the iniquitous extortion.

‘ Very well, good woman, wait until I return with the money.’ Saying which, the miser hobbled across the courtyard into his dwelling-house, and returned with a bag containing the rupees, which he counted over one by one ; and then, not satisfied, and

fearing there might be one too many, placed them in heaps of five rupees, and then again laid them in a mass and told them over in the manner of the shroffs, by three at a time. At last, both parties being satisfied that all was correct, the miser put them into a bag, which, however, he insisted on being returned to him, as he could not afford to give away bags, which cost money. Then came the important act of signing. Holding firm the bag in one hand, with the other he presented the bond, to which the widow affixed her mark, for write she could not. Kheir Neyut was called as a witness, and Ashuk also signed his name to the paper, and then the bag of rupees was given fairly into the hands of the unhappy borrower, who, with her son, was allowed to depart. Ashuk was so enchanted by the sight of Kheir Neyut that he wished, notwithstanding the intolerable heat of the sun, the ceremony of signing and witnessing had occupied a much longer time than it did. Kheir Neyut also felt sorry at the conclusion of the affair, it being but seldom she held even the restrained conversation she had this day enjoyed. As they were departing through the outer gate old Nugdee Hurrees cried out, 'Don't forget the bag.'

'It shall be sent immediately,' said Beewah. 'Farewell, good Kheir Neyut ! we owe you much for your kindness.'

'God protect you, mother !' said the maiden. And thus the gate closed, shutting out a youth who all the way home thought of nothing but the beauty and goodness of the miser's daughter, whilst his distressed mother ruminated only on the avarice of her wretched father.

The widow, having with so much difficulty obtained the sum demanded from her by the implacable Saruk, attended at the court

at the appointed hour and paid it into her stern creditor's own hand, who surrendered her bond, giving, at the same time, a deed of release from all claims upon her. Saruk appeared rather disappointed at this prompt payment, his revengeful disposition having fed itself with hopes of his being able to incarcerate both the widow and her son. Beewah now determined upon removing Ashuk from school, for the purpose of sending him to his uncle at Cambay, and for this purpose visited the schoolmaster.

Adeeb Khan had taken a vast liking to Ashuk ever since his attack on Saruk in his defence ; he was therefore sorry to part with him as a friend, but by no means grieved at losing him as a scholar, his tricks and refractory spirit not only giving him much trouble, but tending considerably to bring the school into disrepute.

‘Allah guide thee ! my boy,’ said Adeeb ; ‘and may you reap benefit from the little you have learned ; but much I fear your inattention to the Koran will prevent your ever becoming a steady man. But, for your mother’s sake, do try and give satisfaction to your uncle, who will, if he finds you deserving, put you in the way of making much money and becoming a man of consequence.’

This kind farewell of the good schoolmaster made little impression on Ashuk, whose thoughts wandered in quite a different quarter ; for he was cogitating how he could gain an interview with Kheir Neyut, and meditating a visit to the miser’s abode for the purpose of returning him his bag, for the care of which so many injunctions had been given. On his return from the schoolmaster’s, therefore, he demanded the bag from his mother, offering

to carry it to the avaricious Nugdee. Beewah produced it, bidding him return quickly. Passing a shroff's shop, Ashuk saw the old miser himself, in close conversation with the money-changer; and, confident he had not been seen by the old man, turned round and proceeded by another direction to his abode, hoping to find the fair Kheir Neyut alone. He knocked at the gate, but received no answer; he repeated the summons, but all was silent. Alas! he was not aware that in Nugdee's absence he ordered his daughter to pay no attention to knocks at the gate—not even to ask who was there.

As the youth stood calling and knocking the old fellow himself appeared, with his key in his hand. Seeing Ashuk, he drew back in surprise, saying, 'Young man, what is your business here?'

'Sir,' replied Ashuk, 'I have brought back the money-bag which you were so kind as to let my mother have.'

'Oh, very well; you are a good boy; I like punctuality; where is it?'

Ashuk produced the bag, which was eagerly seized by the greedy miser, as he stood in the half-opened gate. 'Farewell, young man,' said he; 'go thy ways; heaven protect thee. Shut to the heavy portal.' Thus was poor Ashuk deprived of all chance of beholding Kheir Neyut that day.

Ashuk, disappointed, but not deterred from his purpose, wandered around the building; and proceeding through the narrow lane at the back of the house, to his great joy beheld the fair Kheir Neyut standing at the window which overlooked the spot. He made an obeisance, and the lady smiled, but instantly retreated. Aware of the impropriety of remaining where he was,

he slowly passed on, but could not resist the opportunity now offered of once more turning his head to catch another glimpse of features which had taken such firm possession of his mind. He did so, and was gratified by beholding the lady at the window looking after him. He retraced his steps, and when under the window placed his hand on his heart, saying, 'Grant me, fair lady, a moment's conversation.'

'Not now,' cried she ; ' for heaven's sake, depart !'

'Then at night, three hours after sunset?' She nodded assent, and he quickly left the lane. On his return home he found his mother busy with an amanuensis, who was penning a letter to her brother-in-law, at Cambay, respecting her son Ashuk. When informed of what was going on the youth expressed his dislike to the mercantile life, and his reluctance to quit Ahmedabad ; but the grief of his mother, on hearing his aversion to the employment intended for him, induced him to give a sullen assent to her arrangements, and the letter was accordingly dispatched.

At the time appointed Ashuk proceeded to the narrow lane behind the miser's house, and had the felicity to discover the lady already at her window. He began to express his delight, when she cried, 'Hush, for heaven's sake ! speak low, or my father may hear you.'

Ashuk, in a low tone, therefore, declared that ever since he had beheld her he had thought of nothing else but her beauteous countenance and amiable disposition, and could not rest until he enjoyed the pleasure of a few moments' conversation with her, to express his and his mother's gratitude towards her for her kind intercession in their favour. The bewitching girl made a suitable

reply, and in a low tone expressed her wishes for the comfort of Beewah and the prosperity of himself.

‘ Ah!’ cried the youth, ‘ no signs of prosperity can ever appear to me, unless revived by the sunshine of your approbation. Failing to create an interest in thy heart, fair Kheir Neyut, my prospects must ever be blighted in the bud.’

‘ Oh ! say not so, Ashuk, but rest assured I cannot behold the progress of thy prosperity or adversity with indifference.’

‘ Then will I strive to gain your esteem and approbation, fairest Kheir Neyut, and a thousand thanks do I give thee for this interview; but, alas ! it may be long ere I enjoy a second, for my mother is already about to send me to Cambay. Say, lovely girl, therefore, wilt thou not allow me once more to say farewell beneath this window?’

‘ I durst not, Ashuk ; this must be our last. On your return, however, I promise to grant you an interview ; and, remember, I shall earnestly look forward to the time.’

‘ Then farewell, adorable girl, and remember I live but for thee.’

Here he sighed, and turned his steps homewards. His mother, perceiving his dejection, was deeply concerned, and enquired the cause. He frankly informed her of his love for the miser’s daughter.

‘ Oh ! Ashuk, how you grieve and distress me by your presumptuous madness ! You cannot, must not, think on Kheir Neyut.’

‘ Cannot ! must not !—why, my mother?’

‘ Because she is already promised to another.’

‘ Promised to another ! To whom ? ’

‘ To Ajeez, the son of Saruk. ’

‘ Oh ! my mother, now you have extinguished the last spark of comfort in my bosom. It must not be ; you shall see, mother ; I say it shall not be. I will prevent it. ’

‘ Oh ! son, will this mad rashness never forsake you ? Have you sense, and talk thus ? Remember your poverty, and call to mind the wealth of Saruk and his son. Besides, the agreement is made ; and after three years, when Ajeez has made a voyage to Calcutta on some mercantile speculation, he is to return and marry Nugdee’s daughter. I have no doubt, were it possible for you to amass double their wealth, old Nugdee would not scruple to break his agreement with Saruk ; but otherwise, certainly not. Go, I beseech you, to Cambay, and turn your thoughts to business, and henceforth dream not of love. ’

The distracted youth made no reply to this sensible address, but encouraged the soft dreams of love, instead of banishing them as advised, from his mind for ever.

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